Psychological Acts

Essays on the psychology of the stranger places in the lives of people throughout their history living on a solitary blue marble in space

By

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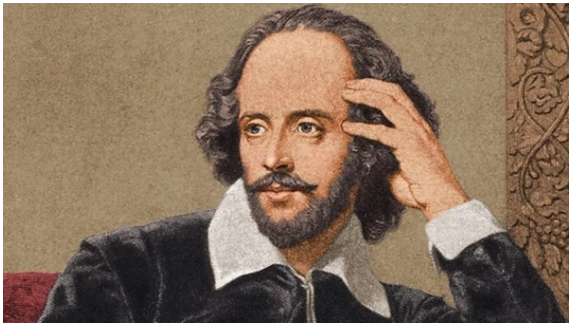
1

WHEN THE ELIZABETHANS TOOK OVER

As history tells the tale, the old regime fell quickly, and before you knew it there was a new ruler and a renewal of the horrible status quo. Girls were sequestered, consigned to domestic chores, and were not permitted to attend school, and child marriages were the norm. The state religion was supreme, taught and memorized in schools, with hours of worship and daily scripture reading mandated for all. Heretics were persecuted, modern conveniences were unknown, and people on the whole were unkempt, uncouth, and pretty dirty, and high mortality for disease followed. Head chopping, hand lopping, and being strung up on the nearest bridge was acceptable justice. But the people, bored as they were, were promised suitable entertainment with sex, violence, bawdy humor, and iambic pentameter! Playhouses would be erected across the land so the people could be entertained, and keep an eye on! Life was great, comparatively speaking for the times at least….But who were these horrible miscreants, and would civilization stand for them?
Evidently, it did.
For these were the Elizabethans!
Returning civilization to the barbarous 16th century, just a few hundred years ago, we would note that in that era we had authoritarian rule, religious orthodoxy, a tolerance for persecution and slavery, and a rather primitive civic and people, and this was the English Renaissance as it were, a relative boon to humanity given that past eras were far worse. All of our renaissances were at root cruel and unjust times, and if viewed from the lens of history, our

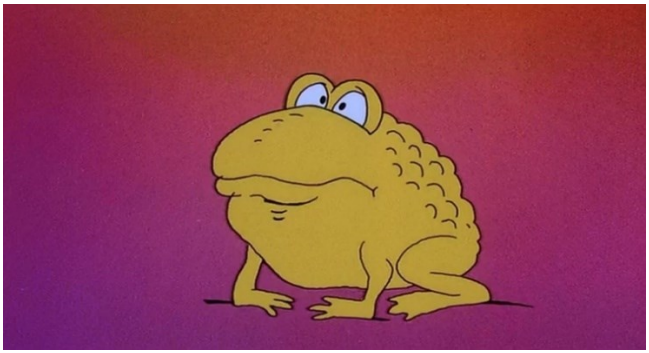
sensibilities would have all of their literary and physical monuments torn to the ground, with legacies tarnished by our present-day standards of right and wrong. To focus on history's miseries rather than it's grandeurs is to diminish our inspiration to the dead hand of facts, and I for one would celebrate an Elizabeth, Drake, and Shakespeare in a different way, while keeping
in mind the harsher truths of life and why for flowers to bloom, they need to sprout from common dung.



Bill Shakespeare, Cultural Minister

2
Canned Hamlet

Communications, whether genetic or through common speech, can have its rough spots when we are literally without words; but nature, and human nature finds a way. Consider cloning. If you have a dinosaur that you wish to resurrect from the bone yard, it's understandable that you will likely have an incomplete DNA code. Never fear, for you can use some handily available frog DNA to tie together the missing DNA sequences. And we know how that turned out! When nature's code is broken, enterprising humans can just add a few strands of genetic text, and presto, you have dino replicas that just happen to replicate like frogs, perfect specimens for your soon to open Jurassic Park! The same thing applies to the fractured syntax of the modern word, where complete sentences are becoming as rare as the complete genome of a Triceratops. As we move into the post-literate era when the printed word is replaced by pictures, sound bites, and videos displayed on the appendages of our little screens, we find that the DNA of our common language is becoming more fractured than ever, and we need frog like words and phrases to glue it all together and connect the broken threads of our thought, more or less. The one thing we can be sure of Is that this new speak is multiplying like crazy, you know, like frogs, like, you know what I mean?



Ribbiting Conversationalist

Olde Speak vs. New Speak

***HAMLET (olde** speak)*	*HAMLET (new speak)*
To be, or not to be? That is the question—	*To be or not to be? You know what I mean?*
Whether 'tis nobler in the mind to suffer	*Like whether its noble in the mind to hurt real bad*
The slings and arrows of outrageous fortune,	*The slings and arrows of bad luck,*
Or to take arms against a sea of troubles,	*or just get all riled up against all this awful stuff*
And, by opposing, end them? To die, to sleep or to	*or just being, you know, stubborn, off myself*
No more—and by a sleep to say we end	*Like, just to doze off, you know what I'm sayin?*
The heartache and the thousand natural shocks	*What a headache, and like, its throbbing*
That flesh is heir to—'tis a consummation	*I'm achy all over.*
Devoutly to be wished! To die, to sleep.	*I wish I was dead, or conk out*
To sleep, perchance to dream—ay, there's the rub,	*Or just doze off and enter dreamland, but like,*
For in that sleep of death what dreams may come I	*What about my dreams, know what*

When we have shuffled off this mortal coil,

Must give us pause. There's the respect

That makes calamity of so long life.

mean?

Like, when we're really dead, and haunting stuff

Give me a break, like, I'm really thinking

And living long is a pain, know what I'm sayin?

3
Barbarians at the Gate

It's easy for us to conceive of the fall of empires. Born in hubris, and often ending because of it, waning civilizations are generally conceived to be innervated to luxury, have poor governance, and are careless of defense, easy pickings to up and coming invaders. That's the Roman Empire for you, and its decline and fall, or its western half at least, was a comeuppance to its faults, where the barbarians merely giving its teetering edifice a push.

Still, we bemoan what Rome's fall cost, a seat of learning, of law, and in spite of its excesses, at least the chariots ran on time. The Romans were simply overwhelmed by a wave of migrants that pushed aside fortified boundaries, defeated the legions, and simply ransacked the place.

Well, not exactly.

If anything, the opening of the great American west is a better metaphor. The barbarians were just tribes of folks trekking out west with their families and wagons, looking for good homesteads and peace with the much more numerous natives, and if they caused a bit of chaos and rapine here and there, it came with the territory. Their numbers told the tale. Barbarian tribes were never more than a small percentage of the native population. For example, the Ostrogoths and Visigoth tribes number no more than one hundred thousand apiece, the Burgundians twenty-five thousand, and the Vandals eighty thousand, hardly enough to disturb commerce and the arts, and certainly not to keep the common language from straying from Romance.

Barbarians at the checkout gate

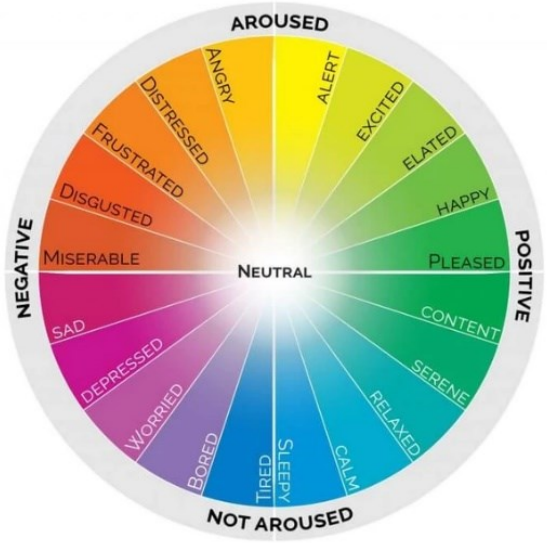
The barbarians of old, like the western pioneers, were not liberators or conquerors, but they were libertarians, and the Roman population, crushed by onerous taxation and regulation, for the most part welcomed this release from misgovernance. Of course, freedom is but a few degrees removed from anarchy, and eventually the common people made deals with the more powerful among them to trade protection for a cut of the harvest. A decent enough trade, given what came before. And so feudal kingdoms gradually arose from a dark ages that presaged the barbarians long before they arrived. Still, one must wonder. If dark age sensibilities were replaced by new age sensibilities, would the world have been a nicer place? The barbarians would keep within their borders, refrain from invading other places and wanton nation building, and would trade with the Romans and even share with them burgeoning Teutonic wealth and technology. The Romans peace would endure, and so would the Roman rot, and misrule would be ossified and passed down from generation to generation, with poverty and misery a common fate, and refugees periodically flooding into peaceful Germania, a societal

wasteland that outsiders would call peace. The alternative is not inviting, given that dark ages happened anyways, and to consider it nowadays is simply unthinkable. After all, to cauterize a festering civilization by iron and fire, no matter the eventual healing, would simply be barbarous.

4
The Colors of Affect

The colors of the rainbow do not begin to reflect all of the infinite hues of reflected light. However, the myriad colors of the world are not separate things, but are in truth admixtures of three primary colors, red, yellow, and blue. This simple conceptual scheme provided the explanation of color that made the replication of color easy, to the delight no doubt of interior decorators the world over. Deriving complex structure from elemental processes serves all the physical and biological sciences, and like the metaphors of disease and space and time, can encapsulate a world view in a phrase. However, feelings or affective states have not been so tractable, though an early psychologist would demur. He was the late 19th century psychologist Wilhelm Wundt, the founder of experimental psychology. Wundt wanted to know the rudiments of felt experience, or affect, and his aim was to see if affect, like color, can be derived from rudimentary components. Wundt believed that the affective components of the human mind could be determined by rigorously objective introspection. That is, he thought that affect or feelings could be broken down (or reduced) to their basic elements without sacrificing any of the properties of the whole. Wundt's introspection was not a casual affair, but a highly practiced form of self-examination. He trained his students to make observations that were free from the bias of personal interpretation or previous experience, and used the results to develop a theory of affect which derived from three bi-polar dimensions. According to Wundt: "In this manifold of feelings… it is nevertheless possible to distinguish certain

different chief directions, including certain affective opposites of predominant character."



The Affective Circumplex

Wundt identified three bipolar dimensions whose permutations comprised moment to moment affective states: (i) pleasurable versus un-pleasurable, (ii) arousing versus subduing, and (iii) strain versus relaxation. An attentive reader would note that strain versus relaxation also reflect unpleasant and pleasant affective states, however these states differ from our workaday pleasures and pains because they are continuously rather than intermittently present. So, with this new perspective, Wundt in effect postulated one discrete and two continuous affective dimensions. For example, a delicious meal or touching a hot pan are pleasurable and unpleasurable states that occur discretely, however the relative activity of the covert musculature is continuous, as is our moment-to-moment state of alertness, or attentive arousal.

What Wundt did not know and could not know at the time due to the rudimentary observational tools then available was the source of arousal and pleasure, which are respectively due to the activity of mid-brain dopaminergic and opioid systems. The neuromodulator dopamine elicits a feeling of alertness and energy, but not pleasure, and is induced through the experience and anticipation of novel positive events. On the other hand, opioids are responsible for pleasure, and are elicited in very small regions or 'hot spots' in the brain by exteroceptive (food, drink) and interoceptive stimuli (relaxation). Finally, arousal and pleasure are not just complementary but synergistic. In other words, pleasure stimulates arousal, and arousal stimulates pleasure. This reflects the fact that the neuronal assemblies or nuclei that induce dopaminergic and opioid activity abut each other in the midbrain, and when individually activated can have synergistic effects, or dopamine-opioid interactions. This can explain why high arousal and pleasure, or ecstatic, peak, or 'flow' experiences, correspond to novel and 'meaningful' experiences during relaxed states. If we map the continuous affective dimensions of Wundt's proposal to each other, when informed by affective neuroscience, Wundt's color wheel can bloom, and account for and predict different affective states. The vertical axis would represent dopaminergic activity, from high to low, whereas the horizontal axis would represent the degree of covert neuro-muscular activation, or muscular tension, again from high to low. High arousal would be felt as a sense of energy or alertness, and low arousal would be felt as a sense of lethargy or depression. High tension would be felt as anxiety or nervousness, and low tension would be felt as a pleasurable state of calm or relaxation. Mapping these

affective events to their physiological correlates gives us emergent subjective states that match the emotional labels of our affective wheel, or an 'emotional circumplex'. Thus 'elation', or a state of pleasure and arousal would occur when arousal is high and tension is low, 'frustration' would reflect high arousal and high tension, 'worry' would reflect low arousal and high tension, and 'relaxation' would correspond to low arousal and low tension. And so with a little tinkering of Wundt's proposal, his observations are correct after all, and perhaps as the affective wheel turns can help psychologists arrange the colors of emotion in ways that would do interior decorators of the soul proud.

5

JEFF BEZOS' COBBLESTONE HUT

Jeff Bezos in better times

We get jealous easily, and a simple trend line can set us off in the worst way. Take income inequality for example. It seems that the top 1% of earners are well on their way to owning 99% of the world's wealth, and that can't be a good thing, comparatively speaking that is. We tend to see the uber rich as real-life incarnations of Scrooge McDuck, with a yacht the size of the Titanic, a country estate as large as Epcot, and a vault with gold coins a mile down and a mile wide where they can take a daily swim. It's all about contrasting our stuff with their stuff, and it is the imagery that really counts. That the rich recklessly spend much of their money, while reserving the rest in boundless and inert pools of cash is a neat image, and can be solved in two ways. One is by taking their toys away from them, or two, by taking the money that they use to buy their toys. The latter solution is the familiar tax the rich gambit, where the rich pay their fair share to the government, like nearly all of it.

The former solution, which I prefer, is to take the toys away, and restrict them to living in modest cobblestone huts, take simple vacations in the Ozarks, and paddle only in canoe sized yachts. They get to keep their gotten gains, whether ill or not, and no vault diving allowed! The issue is that even if a Bezos like character gets his rocket liner, private island, and mega-yacht replaced by a cobblestone hut, 1956 Volkswagen, and a canoe, in either case he is only spending a fraction of his wealth. The rest of it is not in some bottomless money pit, but in the business enterprise that coined them their gold. We would be just fine with capitalists who were more in line with Bob Cratchit than Ebenezer Scrooge, but either way the real question is whether individual or social goods are the most important. It is this tension between private and government spending, or between individual and societal goods that is most important, and this is apportioned between all individuals and ultimately transcends mere envy. As for the jealousy part, that's something we just can't help, however a cobblestone equity act is something we can all buy into, while keeping us comfortable when we buy into Amazon stock, whether it is denominated in tender vittles or tender offerings, whose relative virtues will be always debated.

6
Virtuous Circuits

Our pleasures don't just happen, they take calibration. Context is important, and novel and positive expectation is the seasoning that enhances the pleasures of life. Take movie theater popcorn for example. We don't buy the stuff to complement our viewing experience but to accentuate it. We save the best gulps for the best emotional gulps, and reserve the pleasure for the novel expectancy, or in cinematic terms, the most exciting moments. For our daily pleasures, the routine is the same, as we consciously or non-consciously pair attentive arousal with pleasure, and make sure that our daily bread is always accompanied by a virtual circus, as in good conversation, a good movie, or a good internet link.Our pleasure adds to our interest, and our interest add to our pleasure. This is a metaphorical virtuous circuit, where different elements of experiences are synergistic, and multiply rather than merely add to each other. This emotional circuit can be seen across all experience that has pleasure and arousal as components, from food and drink to even our workaday lives. For example, when we are pleasurably relaxed, performing or anticipating the imminent prospect of activity that has meaning and has meaningful entailments is associated with enhance pleasure and arousal. The latter perplexes us, and we have different names for it, from flow and peak experiences to work satisfaction, and different metaphorical explanations too, from brain waves to consciousness

raising. Thankfully, however, emotional circuits have their neurological equivalent. Indeed, the neurons or brain cells that produce the neurochemicals that are responsible for pleasure, or opioid systems, are in the same mid-brain location as those that increase our interest or attention, or dopamine systems. When either system is activated, the other is activated too, and when both are, then our emotional reaction due to this virtuous circuit can be quite literally ecstatic, demonstrating how a metaphorical circuits can indeed have a neurological flip side. But metaphorical circuits, even when the neurological equivalent is obscured or denied, are ultimately justified by pragmatism, of 'folk' wisdom for just us folks. So, if you want to be happy and ecstatic, in addition to knowing how your bread is buttered and where to eat it, know also that to avoid distraction and achieving a sense of calm, that anticipating and engaging in meaningful activity is the best route to happiness.

When sensations collide!

These observations were confirmed by recent experiments by Rauwolf and colleagues, who demonstrated that reward uncertainties do indeed increase the reported pleasure of food and drink, and by implication that any contextual cues, from a well worded menu to the ambience of an expensive

restaurant lead to high expectations and greater pleasure in our dining experiences, as we know at least non-consciously already.

Rauwolf P, Millard SK, Wong N, Witt A, Davies TJ, Cahill AM, Madden GJ, Parkinson JA, Rogers RD. (2021) "Just not knowing" can make life sweeter (and saltier): Reward uncertainty alters the sensory experience and consumption of palatable food and drinks. *Journal Experimental Psychology General*, much more on the neuropsychology of happiness and motivation and my little happiness procedure on

7
Antonio Salieri, Homer Simpson, and the Echoes of Genius

In the movie 'Amadeus' the aged composer Salieri despaired that his once exalted reputation had vanished, with scarcely anyone playing his music, while that vulgar twit Mozart was getting all the attention, and quite literally, the last laugh. Of course, in Salieri's prime he received the best press, the best jobs, the highest laurels, and the ear of a tone-deaf emperor, but ultimately it didn't matter because no one cared. Similarly, consider the legacy of the writers Norman Mailer and William Styron. Lionized by the literary elite, feted with publicity and prizes, their legacy likewise faded with their years, so that almost no one reads them anymore, while a vulgar twit named Kurt Vonnegut gets the attention, the readers, and the last laugh.

Every donut has meaning

Ultimately, the argument of who is better or right is irrelevant if no one pays attention. Like a tree falling in the forest, does an argument matter if it isn't heard? The celebrated debates in philosophy and psychology are mere footnotes in our collective memory, not because they have been settled, but because no one cares. As I read the umpteenth argument for or against evolutionary/freudian/behavioristic psychology, arguments full of storm and fury and torturous logic, I know as well that they are significant to next to no one. This is because their authors do not consider the simple fact that people do not ponder the meaning of existence or their behavior as much as the meaning of that doughnut they ate this morning. But does this mean that the only philosophy that matters is written by Homer Simpson? Not really, but it does mean that you need to include a little Homer Simpson in your heroic and immortal prose. That is, to convince people, you must first *engage* them, and philosophies that are immortally beloved must not only mix high logic with high art, but also carry a good tune. That right dose of hummable vulgarity imbues a Mozartean or Shakespearean quality that makes the logic go down, and as Kurt Vonnegut likely knows now, an echo in eternity that even God will take pause to listen.

8
Gone in a Fortnite, the Rise of Junk Culture

Recently, a 13-year-old kid wins a Fortnite Cup after spending entire half of his waking life for the last two years playing the video game on line. Think about that. In his room, passing the day and evening along with 150 million others virtually running around in circles. My modest opinion on this?
We are all doomed.

Fortnite for Hamsters

In the past, spending eight hours a day doing anything meant you were doing something that assuredly made you healthier, wealthier, or wise. In 1955, spending most of your day playing ball, practicing piano, socializing with friends, or just thinking about the universe got you somewhere. Now the only thing our entertainments provide is good muscle memory. Meanwhile, social skills, intellect, and

muscle mass rot, literacy falls, obesity rises, and our body politic is expressed on twitter feeds. This is beyond argument, just follow the trend lines and it is easy to see how our society is barreling off a cliff.

Before the industrial revolution, the concern of our ancestors was the lack of calories, now our concern is with empty calories. For culture, the trend is the same. I guess we are chimps after all, with evolved brains that allow us to understand the world when not otherwise distracted by bright and shiny objects, which are getting brighter and shinier by the hour.

9
My Scandalous take on LBGTQ+

I don't care. Not interested. No opinion. Don't want to talk about it. And I think nearly all folks feel the same way. Private sexual behavior is to no one's interest, just as no one cares what our neighbors eat, drink, or mumble in private. It is none of our business, and we don't care. In fact, even the settings that are the exclusive province of private behavior have an equal disinterest in popular culture. I am not talking about bedrooms, but bathrooms. Name one genre in popular entertainment that even mentions bathrooms, let alone make them a setting for a dramatis personae! Indeed, no one has to go, or excuse themselves to go, or even seem to need to go in any of the media of popular culture from tic tock videos to videos on IMAX. Does that mean that we abhor natural bodily functions and the places we employ them? Nope, it just means that we don't care. So private behavior is to no one's interest, so why are the sexual minority, and I'm talking about 5% of the population here, so riled up about it? It's because private behavior once revealed can encourage public prejudice, but how do you separate prejudice from simple judgment? I would argue that it is not prejudice, but preference that is the predominant issue here, yet finding prejudice everywhere is a good way of avoiding responsibility for other reasons why people don't like you, such as a lack of talent, personality, or drive. Indeed, while improving your own shortcomings, why not share your pain by improving

the shortcomings of others, who have to suffer along with you with reeducation, affirmative action, and listening to you whine? Grievance after all is now an industry, and grievance can produce counter grievance which is confirms this silly business in a vicious circle.

As for the representation of alternative sexual lifestyles, we avoid it because we're just not in to it. That Civil War dalliance between Scarlett and Melanie died on the vine because the public, by and large, did not care. Heterosexuals could care less about the sexuality of their stars, but for romance, just give them Cark Gable and Vivian Leigh every time.

An affair to not remember

As for the rest, frankly, I don't give a damn.

Racial Imperialism, from Octoroons to Macaroons

Yummy macaroons, no matter the color!

The census bureau has made much of the decline of Caucasian Americans as a percentage of the American population, a literally shady proposition if you ignore a little shade that is. You see, if you are Caucasian, or a white folk, you can be a card-carrying member of another race by just jiggling your genetics a little. So if one of your parents was black, then you can be black too, and the same goes if one of your grandparents were black, or if one of your great grandparents were black. The same goes for any ethnicity, so one can easily recategorize themselves as native American, Latino, or even Italian by just a nostalgic trip to Ancestry dot com. So even if your ancestor was an Inuit woman who had an affair with the Viking Leif Erikson in 1010 AD, you can qualify as a native American and get lots of affirmative action perks and assorted deference. (Just ask Senator Elizabeth Warren, who claimed American Indian

status for the Texas state bar in 1986, though her DNA test suggested a possible native American ancestor ten generations ago) Racial reclassification can be a great thing because then you have a new social distinction to rally behind, which you can use to get a leg up in social status when you argue that your new status hasn't given you a leg to stand on due to all that awful past discrimination. It is an even better thing when you are re-classified by default, thus obscuring or even canceling out your ancestry from other races. This is an awful thing for us shrinking white folk, as we will disappear in a generation or two the way things are going. But this is merely a legalistic vanishing act, due to what I would call racial imperialism. I would suggest no racist solution of course, but a racial one is certainly in the cards. In the past, individuals who were half black were called mulattos, quarter black were quadroons, and one-eighth black were octoroons. Let's bring that back, along with similar distinctions for the different blends of people that are produced every day by this great American melting pot. With this new trend, in the future we will have entirely new classes of people who have their own reserved slice of recognition, preference, social justice, affirmations, reparations, or just plain guaranteed fifteen minutes of fame, on the hour every hour that is. We can have all sorts of new racial distinctions like macaroons, buffoons, and loony toons to keep us distracted, persecuted, and busy on our twitter, Facebook, and other social feeds all day. And maybe then we can see the nonsense in all of this and recognize that we are all under the hood just people after all.

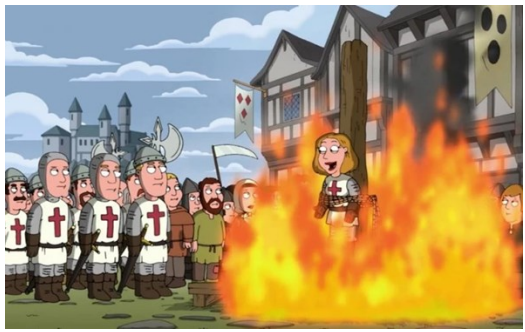
The Powerball of Death!

Congrats! You're dead!

Why Vaccine Hesitancy has to do with how we process novelty Let's say the government, in its usual ineffable wisdom, mandates that everybody has to buy a Powerball ticket, with the winner getting killed. And it also mandates that everybody go to work the next day, as usual. For the first option, even though the odds of getting the lethal Powerball number are astronomical, the entire nation would be consumed with worry, and stay up late until the drawing before releasing a huge sigh of relief, except for one. And the next day, they obey the mandate to show up for work without a thought, even though it is much likely that the daily commute will kill you. For the daily commute, we not only know the odds, but experience has caused us to ignore them. For the lottery ticket, there are no lessons from experience, unless of course the government continues its daily lottery mandate, in which case we would learn to ignore it as blithely as the dangers of our daily commute. This is why we are fine with universally imposed vaccinations for measles, polio, and other dangerous

diseases, and be a bit upset with a Covid shot, conflating a vaccination shot with being shot dead. It has nothing to do with being smart or dumb, liberal or conservative, Republican or Democrat. It is just that we are uncomfortable or comfortable with the odds of new things, depending upon the outcome. So if you want to get comfortable with the odds of life, it pays to just get on with living

Calvinistic Culture



All is forgiven. NOT!

Our cultural gods proclaim, as usual, that sin is everywhere, but it's not so much in the obvious places, but in the virtual ones. Violence to persons has morphed into violence to personal sensibilities, and we take affront and seek vengeance for all of those wayward thoughts that folks have graciously time stamped on social media, and are ripe for discovery given a google search or two. And for our sins no one will indulge us, which is bad news to the more Catholic tradition that has economically morphed from buying indulgences to granting them wholesale for a hail Mary or two. With a few prayers, a private confession, and a public apology or two, you would be forgiven and ready to go. Not anymore. Presently a social Calvinism has replaced the confessional, and you can still repent, but only on the pyre, as your reputation and livelihood goes up in flames, and banned on Facebook and twitter, you are never heard from again. Its predestination writ large in social media, recording not only all we do and have been through, but our ancestors as well. That's a lot of personal and generational guilt to carry about, though you may repent, your fate is still sealed. But God knows, you had it coming!

When Hollywood came to town

Send in the clones!

Suppose when cloning becomes the norm, an enterprising biologist with an eye to entertainment will clone three icons of Hollywood, Cary Grant, Katherine Hepburn, and Jimmy Stewart, along with William Shakespeare for dramatic support. Anticipating high demand, he will make 10,000 copies of them. Naturally, modern day Hollywood would only take a few sets of these folks, with the rest distributed to towns across the land where they will spend their evenings putting on shows at the local little theater, with newly scripted plays by Bill Shakespeare such as 'Romeo and Ethyl, the Pirate's Daughter'. This of course would revive the local theater scene, and give lots of inspiration for other playwrights, actors, and supporting crews. In this case, high quality will stimulate high demand, but does high demand stimulate high quality? In economics, this works not just for burgers and cars, but for artistry as well. As history attests, you can be sure of it. All of the renaissances in history were provincial affairs, supported by the local citizenry who in eras where entertainment had

to be home grown, turned to local talent, and created the local venues where it could be encouraged. And so were created the Athenian amphitheater, the Globe and Rose theatres in Shakespearean London, and Vienna opera house in Mozart's day. And with high demand, genius soon followed, and with it a supporting cast that would put envy in our trio of stars. Genius by nature is a rare thing, and to get there you must make demand universal where a thousand flowers must bloom before a single rose amongst them stands tall. And to do it you need not a faraway factory farm but a local pasture, well tilled, and with an encouragement to flower.

Supply Chain gets Torpedoed!

Teletubby shipment get torpedoed!

There was trouble with our goods, because there were no goods. But the American people were prepared for it, and scarcely complained. Supply chains were disrupted or nonexistent. Strawberries could be had only a few months in the year, and from fruits and vegetables to chickens, everything else had to be grown locally. Handicrafts and do it yourself was making do, and clothes were assembled from sewing patterns and sewing machines. Only a few types of imported goods were at the local store, and even Heinz had only 5.7 varieties. People stayed put, and even flying cost a month's wages. Kids made their own toys from cardboard boxes, string, and a hefty dose of imagination. And life was good. And where was the global supply chain? Well, at this time much of it was lying at the bottom of the sea. It was 1950, and you could blame World War 2 or a rudimentary logistics grid, but there was no real scarcity of goods, just a massive reduction in choice, relative to the

future that is. But since memory served up even worse times, there was no complaint everything from ice cream to cars came in only a few varieties. If memory does not serve up contrasts to better times, present times can hardly be worse, and in essence they really aren't if we use our varietal ingenuity to make variety out of pieces of cardboard and balls of string. And in that regard, this black and white era had the most bountiful and diverse goods of all, virtually served up by that most versatile of devices, our human imagination.

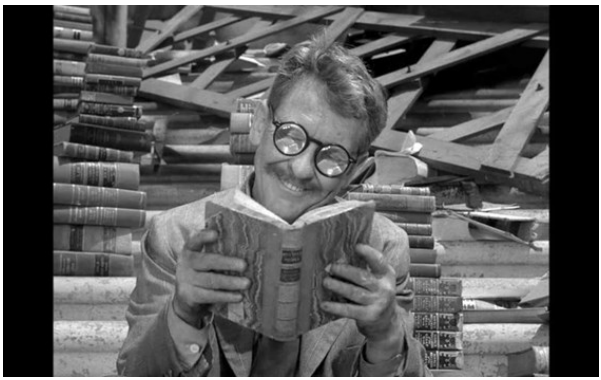
On Trolls

Uninvited Visitors

We are living in a world where not only nature, but human nature is being highly inconsiderate. And we are as troubled as we are enticed about trivial things being the rage, but figuratively and literally. So, what else is new? It's not that polite discourse has declined, it is that the wreckage of discourse, like a car wreck, commands attention, interest, and outrage. Added to the fact we can broadcast our rage to everyone, and so it seems that the whole world is riveted by verbal carnage. My mean letter and the meaner response from my angry correspondence to my water department/best friend/lawyer in 1950 wouldn't make the back page of the local gazette, now however it can be posted for all the world to see. A distracting and painful trend to be sure. Yet it can all be corrected if we invest in a metaphorical screen door, which for the most part we do. We just have to install a few more doors. Shall I explain? If everyone it seems is looking out to see you coming, at least you should look out to see them coming, and that includes

all creatures big or small that in principle instinctively advance their own interest before your own. To demonstrate this, open your household door, and all sorts of visitors both benign and malign will enter, from the six legged and four-legged kind to the two legged one. Open our virtual doors, and the result is the same, and we always remember the mess our visitors leave, rather than the beds they made. As for our normal lives, we have screen doors for the physical intruders, and internet screening for the virtual ones, so that on line trolls are consigned to junk email and are deleted immediately, and if they command your attention, their name and identify is on the command line for us to make sure. You are the gatekeeper after all, and whether you are at home or are virtually at home, it is up to you who you admit to your attention and those who truly have something to say. A hard task to do, to avoid the train wrecks of common discourse on the internet and common media that invariably make it as noxious comments to your social network feed, but such is our own weakness, as avoiding the plague means to avoid others who may carry the plague as well as those who merely have an infectious personality. But the alternative is the real and virtual diminution of the species, which we must ultimately strive to avoid, like the plague.

Time Enough at Last!

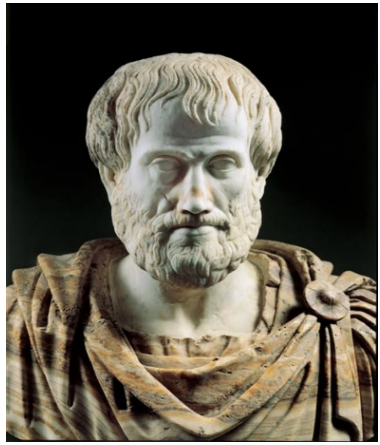


If you wait long enough, things just blow over, or just get blown up, and you can settle back to a life of leisure where you can do all the things you wanted to do. The irony of retirement is that even when things get blown up, leaving you all alone with your books and endless cans of beans, you need to have something stashed away, like an extra pair of eyeglasses. In a classic episode of the original Twilight Zone series, that was the problem with a Henry Bemis, a mild-mannered bank clerk with a penchant for reading books, anywhere, and all the time. His shrewish wife hounded him, tore up his book of poetry, and not appreciated by a culture that scorned the written word, retired to a bank vault to read in solitude. Then the H Bomb hit. Disoriented at first, but upon finding conveniently irradiated food and the wreck of the public library with its books intact, solitude became a godsend. He arranges the books in literary gallery, and bending over to read the first book, trips and smashes his glasses, his hopes consigned to oblivion and him to despair. For myself, in my retirement years, I will lay out all of the thousand books in my personal library to read at my leisure, keep to my own solitude with

Shakespeare and Dickens as company, and scribble my own books to satisfy my own personal muse. I will keep two pairs of reading glasses of course. And soon enough, I'm dead, all is oblivion. Goes to show, there's never time enough. As a side note: In 'The Scary Door', a show-within-a-show on Futurama parodying The Twilight Zone, pokes fun at the final twist in "Time Enough at Last". When the man in the episode loses his glasses, he realizes he can still read large print since his eyesight is not as bad as he perceived; his eyes fall out, but he declares he can read Braille; his hands fall off, and as he screams, his tongue falls out and then his head falls off. Bender comments, "Cursed by his own hubris."

WHEN ARISTOTLE GOT THE INTERNET

Aristotle got the internet the other day, as well as the whole ancient world. The classical Greeks immediately took advantage of this science fiction chicanery, and in what would seem in a fortnight used this portal to use all the knowledge of the world to take command of the world, economically that is. After all, why take over the Celts when even when armed with universal knowledge they have not the wits to make even a decent Celt phone? Better to make and sell them scads of them instead. And so Aristotle, Plato, and the the lot of the academy and the hyper-competitive Greek city states bootstrapped themselves to lord over the world, while the barbarians merely squabbled, mired in poverty and tribal misgovernment. The Greeks became the new one percenters, owning just about everything, and they did so not because they had exclusive ownership of knowledge, which they did not, but because their society was hyper-incentivized to use and expand that knowledge.



The original 1 percenter

Nowadays, with the internet, knowledge is universal and free, and one can learn to fish, build a home, treat a cold, program a computer, or build a nuclear reactor. Its all there, waiting only for incentive. The maddening thing about the current complaints about unequal distribution of wealth or income is that it is a description of the symptom, not the disease. Rather it is the unequal distribution of incentive as mediated by societal, cultural, and governmental norms that is holding us back. Just ask the ancient Greeks, who in their relative poverty, were the true one percenters in the ancient world, attained not just by their possession of knowledge but by the incentive to acquire more of it, use it, and in their peerless gift to humanity, to be among the first to attempt to explain the world.

I am Spartacus!

Its 71 BC, and the Romans just rounded up the last of those pesky gladiator rebels led by Spartacus, that mean spirited troll who said and did many nasty things to the Romans. Naturally, they were very 'cross' with him, and not having a proper photo ID, asked the real Spartacus to stand up and apologize. All of the captives summarily rose up and said they were Spartacus. Apology accepted, and then they were crucified anyways, with their crosses lining the Appian way.

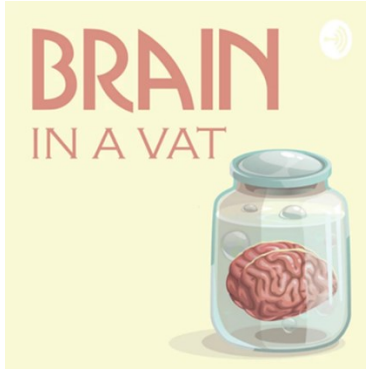
Speed forward to the present day, and if you are a rebellious troll who said something nasty sometime in your pitiful life, you too will be crucified, virtually that is, and your career, reputation, and YouTube spot will be burned to the ground, apology not accepted. The PC radar is unerringly precise, something the Roman's sadly lacked, and the only way to get around it is to jam it, so that when a google search looks for your faux pas, it will discover everybody's, who like all the faux Spartacus' of yesteryear, have to be crucified. Well, I for one am all in, and hereby found the 'I am Spartacus' movement for social justice and collective social suicide.

To join the ‘I am Spartacus’ movement, each of us should place the follow phrase in their social media feed. Just say ‘I hate: blacks, transexuals, republicans, jews, Brazilians, Atlanta Falcons fans, or anybody from San Francisco', or you name it. Lather up and do this once a day. Soon the PC radar will be jammed with millions of malefactors who will soon have a cross to bear, which believe me, is a whole lot better than having to put up with this cancel culture nonsense for another minute.

Brain in a Vat

If there is one thing that mad scientists are attracted to for personal edification, the advancement of knowledge, and of course, taking over the world, it is 'brains'. The best way to study them, at least when you give credence to science fiction and horror genres, is to detach them from their bodies, put them in a nutrient filled vat, and connect them to all sorts of probes that measure the electrical to and fro of brain waves, or excite and depress brain cells to manipulate what the brain thinks and feels. By detaching brains from bodies, this sadly resulted in creations that were more akin to Frankenstein than Einstein, a problem that was remedied by the local gendarmes and lots of aroused peasants with pitchforks and torches. And that's entertainment!

Now fast forward to real brains and the not so mad scientists that study them. For affective and cognitive neuroscientists, brain imaging (fmri) and 'in vivo' or direct stimulation of cellular arrays in the brain are the primary methods to understand how affect is instantiated in the brain, yet cannot account for how neuro-muscular stimuli modulate affect. In other words, the afferent or direct input from the musculature is neglected because of limitations of the observational tools that neuroscientists use, thus effectively making the brain virtually if not literally detached from the body, or disembodied. But neglect is not a research strategy, and impedes the explanatory power of neuroscience. The result does not quite make for Frankenstein, but models of the mind that are more akin to Frankenstein, who was not exactly a true model of a mind.



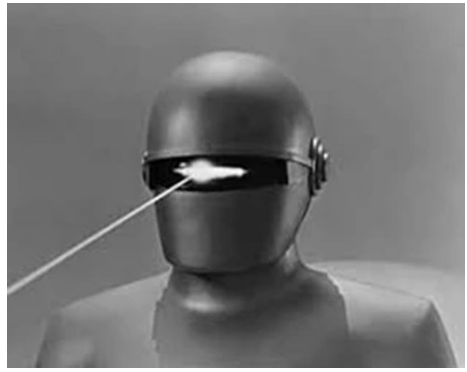
So what's neglected?
A trifling matter of proprioception.
So, what's a proprioceptor?
Proprioceptors (sensory receptors) are located in our muscles and joints and respond to changes in the relative activity of the overt and covert musculature. They also induce changes in affective states in the brain. An example of this is how we experience pleasure. Unlike other functions in the brain, from perception to thinking, the neural source of our pleasures are localized in the brain as specialized groups of nerve cells or 'nuclei', or 'hot spots', located in the midbrain. These nuclei receive inputs from different sources in the nervous system, from proprioceptive stimuli (neuro-muscular activity) to exteroceptive (sensory stimuli: sight, sound, touch) and interoceptive stimuli (satiation and deprivation and associated visceral input) to cognitive stimuli (novel positive or negative means-end expectancies), and all modulate the activity of these nuclei which release or inhibit endogenous opioids that embody the rainbow of pleasures which mark our day.
For example, relaxation induces opioid activity and is pleasurable, but tension inhibits it and is painful. Similarly,

satiation inhibits our pleasure when we eat, and deprivation or hunger increases it. Finally, positive novel means-ends expectancies enhance our pleasures, and negative expectancies inhibit them. It is this interleaving of proprioception, interception, and cognition that makes our affective world go round. Thus, for our sensory pleasures (eating, drinking), watching an exciting movie makes popcorn taste better than when watching a dull or depressing movie. This also applies to when we are relaxed, as thinking or performing meaningful activity is reflected in pleasurable 'flow' or 'peak' experiences when we are engaging in highly meaningful behavior while relaxed. (Meaning will be defined as anticipated or current behavior that has branching novel positive implications, such as creating art, doing good deeds or productive work). Thus if we are tense, we find our pleasures are reduced, and if we are relaxed, they are enhanced, and these affective states are modulated in turn by abstract properties of cognition. That is, our pleasures are highly dependent not only upon how we think but how our bodies overtly and covertly 'move', and by depriving a brain of a body, we cannot fully understand or maximize our pleasures, which can get one a bit grumpy and prone to overturn apple carts. You know, like Frankenstein.

(authors note: this is not to say that neuroscientists deny the influence of bodily or somatic feedback, but rather than the procedures they use are not capable of studying it, and that it is not factored in explanations of motivation as well as specific affective states, such as meditation, which are explained and studied without consideration of neuro-muscular input and how it modulates affect)

TODAY, THE EARTH STOOD STILL

In 1951, the aliens had a better idea towards war.
Decapitate the aggressor, kill him.
And it would be automatic, robotic.
Built into the system like an antivirus program in a computer.
Burning the aggressor to a cinder is one way, and if the aggressor is one individual, you could target and kill him.
With the precision arms we have now, it would have been easy to take out a Stalin, Hitler, or Mao with a missile strike.
It would be just as easy to take out Putin, if not for the nuclear button.
It is a reasonable solution when the aggressor has no nuclear armament, and one the free world must consider.
In not, when one of those flying saucers circling the globe lands, we know what they will likely say, and nuclear button would be no deterrent.



What the world needs now, is Gort, sweet Gort!

Achilles and the Turtle Soup

Or why halfway getting there is all the fun.

A simple fact not normally understood is that most of our thought is not literal but metaphorical. That is, we understand much of our world through images or pictures that when combined into metaphors become the aphorisms, maxims, fables, parables, and mind experiments that teach us in simple and near visual terms the ways of the world. Generally our pictures of the world and the real world are kept in close interplay. Thus if you think of pie in the sky, pies and skies refer to real world events or act as metaphors for behavioral events that are understood and agreed upon by large groups of people.

When we deal with the subtle behavior of objects, such as those physical events that fall beneath our perceptual radar, we use instruments that allow us to describe their minute details, but these details when revealed are still visualized as metaphors. Thus we envision TV signals, radio waves, black holes, cosmic radiation, contagious viruses and so forth through mental pictures, not mental equations. Unfortunately, when we deal with the behavior of people, and in particular the subtle neural or covert behavior that also falls beneath our perceptual radar, we have not until the last decade or so been able to so easily visualize and render metaphorically what we see.

Physical and biological scientists have thus a big advantage over psychologists, since they've got better and more realistic metaphors to work with. That metaphors are the key to understanding our physical and psychological universe is surprising but true. Even Einstein could not keep track of his calculations, and thought instead in terms

of mind experiments. A popular conception about great scientists is that they are constantly tossing about in their mind scads of convoluted mathematical formulae. But this is not true. Physicists are not different from most of us except in the types of physical structures they imagine. To demonstrate this, let's consider a housewife as physicist. Let's say she is planning the décor for a new house. She thinks in terms of the myriad types of things such as flowers, clocks, ottomans, paintings, and chairs that she can acquire, and the near infinite permutations that they can be arranged. She doesn't think of the exact physical measures, descriptions, or other criteria that fully define things like clocks and sofas. That's merely detail, and can easily be filled in when she writes down the specifications to give to her interior designer. The devil of course *is* in the details, but for the housewife its mainly the busy work that follows getting her plan 'right' in her head. She after all knows the mathematics that can describe the dimensions of the objects she is moving about in her mind, but finalizes the 'measurements' when the picture of her final creation is made up in her head.

Physicists are no different in essence from the housewife, except that the objects they think of range from the macroscopic (universes, black holes, galaxies) to microscopic (atoms, photons, gravity waves), and use a mathematical language only to put the final details down. Of course, that language is a whole lot more complex than the simple measurements the housewife used, but the principle is the same.

So one might ask, how can one apply a scientist's imagination to thinking about the real world if one doesn't have the time to master advanced calculus? Easy! You start not with answers, but with questions. Einstein of course is

the par excellence of the inquiring mind, and of course he started with simple metaphorical questions that involved such prosaic things as trains, elevators, and speeding bullets. But the guy who really got the mind experiment business going, and can be called the father of scientific imagination lived almost 2500 years ago in Ancient Greece. In classical Greece, you didn't have instruments to help you dissect the world, but you did have imagination in abundance, and simple daydreams, like simple levers could move worlds.

No one knew this better than the ancient Greek philosopher, Zeno of Elea, who demonstrated the contrariness of nature by showing how our pictures of nature lead us to paradoxes. Among many of his unique beliefs, Zeno didn't have much regard for time, and in fact doubted its existence. In lieu of a mathematical proof in an age when mathematics was just getting started, a simple mind experiment had to fill the bill. So begins the tale of Achilles and the turtle.

It's your classic race of course, ages before Bugs Bunny made it a true fixture in the imagination. The turtle challenged Achilles to a race, who in his confidence, obliged the turtle a modest head start. Now if time was a continuous rather than discrete thing, as our experience holds, then every time Achilles got to the place where the turtle was, the turtle would have been gone. And every time Achilles got to where the turtle was last, the little bugger would likewise be gone. Now this would occur ad finitum, thus proving that the view of a continuous time made for some very long races, and that Achilles took a sucker's bet.

Zeno's paradoxes continue to bedevil physics, which has responded by dismissing them or by embracing them. This latter point of view, eloquently expounded by the physicist Julian Barbour in particular, is that time doesn't exist at all.

But of course, I digress, since its in psychology where Zeno can come to play, and similarly shake's things up a bit.
So here's a simple question. How come we want things, but never want to *have* things? For example, we love sports teams that win championships, meals that taste good, and orgasms that make our hair stand on end. So how come if we want them so much, why not just have them now, and without waiting about?

Enter Zeno.

Who would say that the answer lies in a paradox derived from a faulty common sense approximation of the world. In other words, motivation, like time, is not what you think it is. Let's say, following the master's reasoning that Achilles was after the turtle not to win a race, but to grab him as an essential ingredient for a good bowl of turtle soup. Avoiding the temporal argument for the time being (or being is not in time, as Zeno would have it), then we note that if we are motivated by objective things like orgasms, trophies, and turtle soup, it would be immensely gratifying to rid our selves of the wait and get on to the main course. But of course, that doesn't happen, as getting there is half the fun, or rather our knowledge that we *are* getting there. So the answer is that Achilles, to be really on top of the world, will never actually be on top of the turtle. He's just having too much fun in the chase.
We can encapsulate this fact in a joke from the old Dick Van Dyke TV show in the mid 1960's. The scene pictured our hero eating a piece of cake. "What was that darling, that's pretty good!" "It's your favorite dessert" came the reply. He responded in agony, "Why didn't you tell me before, I love that cake!" In other words, by depriving him the

opportunity to look forward to the cake, the very dessert was wasted.

By being able to 'look forward' to positive events, whether merely informative or sensual, we often feel energized, pleasant, and often rather ecstatic. The vast majority of contemporary psychologists, in their myopic idiocy, attribute obscure mentalistic processes like flow, intrinsic motivation, and so on to this fact. But for those psychologists who take the trouble to look beyond the fuzzy metaphors to the subtle activity of the human brain, two separate motivational processes have been distinguished that truly explain the phenomenon. The looking forward part is due to the release of neurochemicals or 'neuromodulators' that activate or modulate global areas of the brain. They make us more alert, attentive, make the brain think better, and feel good to boot. The consumnatory part, or when we eat the soup or get the girl activate entirely different parts of the brain entirely. Thus we come to a strange bifurcation of our everyday motivations into 'wanting' or 'looking forward to' parts and 'liking' parts when we actually achieve the object of our desire. The philosophical and practical implications of this are legion, and make up the bulk of my serious as well as not so serious articles on my site. But for those who take their psychology straight up, unadulterated by humor or fancy prose, I would recommend the web site of the neuro-psychologist Kent Berridge, who has posted to the web quite a few articles that represent what good psychology is all about.

A Choice of Realities

"By the 2020's full-immersion virtual reality will be a vast playground of compelling environments and experiences. Initially VR will have certain benefits in terms of enabling communications with others in engaging ways over long distances and featuring a great variety of environments from which to choose. Although the environments will not be completely convincing at first, by the late 2020's they will be indistinguishable from real reality and will involve all of the senses, as well as neurological correlations of our emotions. As we enter the 2030's there won't be clear distinctions between human and machine, between real and virtual reality, or between work and play. - Ray Kurzweil

In the movie 'The Matrix', reality or suffering through reality came to a simple choice between a blue pill and a red pill. One reality was pleasant and unreal, and the other unpleasant and real.

Whether you experienced one or the other depended upon your connections, literally. Take the blue pill and you get unplugged, and down you go through an out of this world laundry chute into a dark subterranean world where pea soup is the main course, but at least the whole underworld can get down and boogie in a huge dance party celebrating how good things are when they're really, really, bad.

Facing reality has usually been framed as a good thing, even though it is bad. This is a standard conceit for movie plots, religions, and economic policies. But what if facing and accepting *unreality* is a pretty good thing (or at least for everybody except for you 'neo-Popperian' types), and makes you feel happy, calm, and productive? What if it is the illusion of freedom that is good, except we don't know it yet?

Accepting unreality means forswearing your choices, at least for the present. It is the world of the straight and narrow, where everything is available, in due course. It represents an impingement of choice, but that's unreality for you, as you can't always get what you want or when you need it, and you continually have to come up with new and better explanations to make things a little less unreal. But reality is coming soon, where you can always get what you want, when you want it, and everything is explained for you. This applies to the information revolution, and for many, information is enough to provide a reality of its own. Information is simultaneous, choice is free, and the perceived world becomes a gigantic mash up of words, sights, and sounds, a pea soup of information that puts you

in a dark yet real place that might as well be the center of the earth. But at least you get to dance.

In the conceit of 'The Matrix', and unreality was our modern uncertain world, and reality was a predictable dungeon, created by the 'Unreal' engine of course. But is it in human interest to literally pull the plug and be thrown into the dark stasis of unchanging reality? The question is less a matter of ontology (i.e., what is reality) than what reality you choose to live in, or between the blue pill and the red pill. And that's the point. The explanatory conceit in the movie was that for some reason mankind blackened the sky. This decision will be made by us as well when we recognize that for sanity's sake reality will be too great burden to great to bear, and thus we will allow AI to scuttle silently in the shadows, feeding us dreams of an approximation of the real, and hidden under a darkened sky.

Baby in the Well

It's 1959, and you hear on the 10pm news that a baby has fallen into a well. You won't know any more about the baby's predicament until the next morning, when you read about it in the paper or hear about it in the morning news on TV. In the meantime, you had a life to live, away from stories about babies or just about anything else happening in the world. Nonetheless, you knew what you needed to know, as the facts could wait.

It's 2009, and you hear on the 10pm news that a baby has fallen into a well. For the next 24 hours, you follow from minute to minute the epic saga of the baby's rescue through the web, the all-news channel, and a cascade of tweets. In addition you know what everybody else if thinking about the whole affair, from your friends on Facebook to commentators across the world. In the meantime, you no longer *have* a life to live, since you cannot break away from the continuous narrative about babies and plane crashes and all the news of the world.

A Lethal Combination

Oddly, although the facts can wait, the narrative cannot, and facts become narratives when we attend to and anticipate their every change. But narratives add little to our knowledge, only to the continuous surprises that occur along their winding way. And that's the problem, because we are attending to all of this information not because of the information but because of how the information *turns*. In other words, storytelling replaces knowledge. So this is where the internet or 'cloud' has brought us: a continuing narrative that deludes us into thinking it's making us wiser when it is only making us entertained.

In our workaday affairs, we want to get to the point, as there is no pleasure in the narrative of doing accounting, preparing reports, or writing correspondence. However, work becomes a narrative when we check our email, finances, phone calls and breaking news every minute. We could wait to do these things only at certain times in the day, but that would interrupt the narrative, and the narrative cannot wait. So if you're going to rationalize the need to have any time anywhere knowledge brokered by your i-phone or i-anything, know that it's not because of needing the facts, because the facts can almost always wait. After all, the baby ain't going nowhere.

THE BACH WITHIN

It was Europe in the year 286, and times were tough all over: illegal immigration by scruffy looking people with bad manners, rampant inflation, religious conflicts, and plagues. As the saying goes, the more things change.... So, to fix things the Roman Emperor Diocletian literally fixed things. He thus righted the economic ship of state by fixing wages and prices, and topped if off by fixing nearly everyone's career. So if your dad was a sheep herder or brick layer, that's what you'd be later on in life. And if you didn't like it, you were executed.

Well, Diocletian's master plan didn't work, and the Roman Empire fell anyway. But it did produce a medieval mind-set that saw stability in knowing your own place. It was a deal that was hardly inspiring to the upwardly mobile. Yet when dealt with lemons you might as well make lemonade, and perchance in every few generations would be someone in the lemonade guild who could stir the supreme refreshment.

And so it was with not only cobbling shoes but cobbling music as well, as in olden times the arts were less a diversion than a trade. And as with any avocation, every so often you would produce a master cobbler. It does get you thinking about the natural frequency of genius in small populations of folks who are straight jacketed for generations into career tracks and the invariable one track mind.

That's the Bach family for you. For over two hundred years music was their craft, and music was handed down from generation to generation not like an heirloom, but like a craft that needed to be mastered in order to pay the bills. And genius came naturally, and as with every odd

generation of craftspeople, sometimes the genius was supreme. But it was all blue collar stuff, no Juilliard training here. Just complete an apprenticeship like a junior plumber, and writing fugues become as natural as installing storm drains.

J.S. Bach with score for Cantata #112, 'The Lemonade Cantata'

So what is the lesson? Artistry is like plumbing. Keep your aspirations practical, and music will pay the bills, and every now and then will pay off in artistic genius as well as a great glass of lemonade.

Base Instinct

With the introduction of i-phones and their ilk, an argument may be made that the information age has found not its telescope, but its Cuisinart. The idea seems to be that in order to be as productive in processing ideas as we can be processing baloney (which come to think of it have a lot in common), we can slice, dice, or otherwise multi-task information to ramp up productivity, happiness, and even consciousness to new awe-inspiring levels.

I of course demur, by referring to something else that the new gadgets really appeal to, namely the lemur.

It has to do with the universal, dare I say basest instinct that can easily be overindulged to our emotional ruin. Does this set the stage for a personal rant against the use of these little devices to invade privacy, commit illegal acts, access immoral sites, or generally waste time? Not really. You see, I'm talking about our true base instinct, the urge which is the base not only for us but for our furry ancestors and mammalian cousins. Thus the all in one information appliance appeals in essence not to the consumer, sports fan, or inner child, but to the little lemur that is within us all.

I'm talking about this little guy.

Human Being: Base Model

The lemur, like other small mammals, must be continually on the move. A constant forager, he has to be continually alert to every aspect of his environment in order to find something to eat, or escape from being eaten. This foraging instinct is still with us today, as we are innately sensitive to little surprises that can entail the difference between life and death. The only problem is, for the current generation at least, life and death is not an issue any more. Regardless, we continually act as if it were, and if we had our druthers we would access email, Internet, movies, news, and make phone calls every minute on the minute for hundreds of times a day like a matter of life and death. But does productivity really benefit from accessing the Internet, voice mail, email, and 'Desperate Housewives' videos 400 times day? I think not. Even if mania provided us with some long term benefit, we would still likely end up like little Napoleons, stranded on some rock in the Atlantic.

So there is our grim future, a stress filled life in the fidget lane, with no respite for most of us until we are eventually committed to some proverbial rock in the Atlantic, far from the information superhighway.

CAPTAIN KIRK'S EXPLOSIVE QUESTION

In academic thinking, the quality of persuasion is generally marked by the tonnage of your argument. That is, the more complex, convoluted, and referenced your reasoning, the easier it is to get your opponent down for the count, as you simply squash him with detail. But of course, common folk like you and I know that if you have to make your point with more than a few simple illustrations, you often lose sight what the point *is.* Like assembling a bicycle with the instructions written in Chinese, it's often best to forget the entire thing rather than attempt the job and end up with a pretzel with wheels. Even if life could be managed by remote control, we would nonetheless be fearful of all those buttons, and eschew convenience by living more simply even if inefficiency is in the mix.

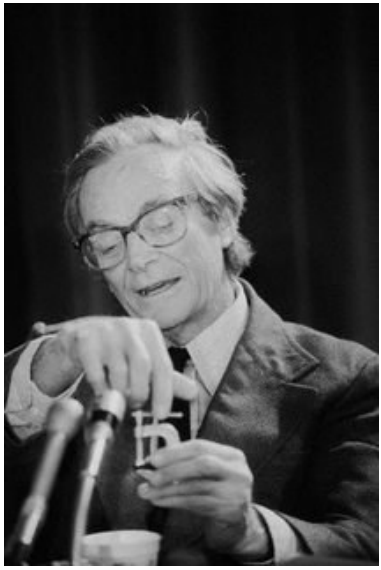
When convenience becomes inconvenient

Thus, we take especial pleasure with things that can be explained to us in a phrase or a simple picture. Like pop top cans or E=MC2, just keep it simple and people will understand, or be *forced* to. Which bring us back to the art of

persuasion. If arguments have the appeal of an instruction manual for a remote control, it will be easy to ignore or fault the contraption after a moment fumbling with it. However, if the argument is simple, then its logic and function are apparent at a glance, and there is no getting away from the truth. It is at this moment that we fume and fuss upon being confronted with a new and uncomfortable fact that we must either accept lest we proverbially explode in a cloud of sparks and smoke.

Socrates knew this well, and relished the opportunity to pin folks down with the explanatory power of a simple solution obviously derived from an equally simple question. But if entertainment value is added to the equation, you just can't beat Captain James T. Kirk of the Starship Enterprise for bringing down hoity toity super thinking machines with a phrase. In the 'The Ultimate Computer', a computer connected to the Enterprise has gone berserk, as computers are wont to do, and is causing a lot of havoc. Kirk asks the machine to restate its purpose, namely, to serve man, and then asks the machine how it can square it with its current behavior, namely serving men up, like toast. Naturally, the computer can't square its logic with the facts, and turns itself off, or in previous episodes pops, fumes, and ultimately blows up.

And that's why we like people who reason like Captain Kirk, who with simple and ingenious argument render the enemy argument and perhaps the enemy itself into ashes. A modern-day Kirk was the physicist and Nobel laureate Richard Feynman, who demonstrated with a glass of ice water how O ring seals were rendered inelastic by cold weather, and thus caused the Challenger space shuttle disaster.



Feynman demonstrating how O Ring does not hold (Concept later adopted for Polident denture commercials.)

A more current argument was presented by Michael Moore, whose documentary 'Sicko' demolished the health care industry through the mere recital of the facts, colorfully posed of course, that Americans spend twice as much per capita on health care for a product half as good as France (which covers everybody), and just as good as that stalwart of efficiency, the Republic of Slovenia. What is remarkable is that critics behave like Kirk's computer, and fuss and fume with smoke and non-sequiturs (e.g. Moore is fat, a socialist, etc.) that refute nothing. I anticipate that this is a prelude to the American health care system exploding, like O ring manufacturers.

And of course, as the circle turns, we are left with the human psyche, which we are assured is too complex to easily

understand, sort of like the intractable physics of O rings. Thus we skip the 'convenience' of a long-winded text on psychology for an easier answer gladly provided by the Doctor Phils of the world. But easy answers are no substitute for sharp questions, which is why in these troubled times we need a lot more Captain Kirks to ask a few simple questions.

THE CONSPIRACY OF THE BOOKS

They crept in, etched their way in was more like it. Passive infecting things these codes! It is a conspiracy of the software, those immutable and silent lines of words, strung of characters, and finally reducible to bits that say yes or no, and no more. There are everywhere, leather bound in ledge like shelves, encoded in the vibrations of sound, light, and magnetic fields. They are the activity and the residue of our minds:
Ideas.
Ideas and only ideas can comprise the meaning of life, but that's circular reasoning, since after all what else can 'meaning' mean except ideas? Meaning is the great modifier, while life is the great constant. Life or consciousness is the light that animates knowledge, yet life itself is meaningless because the meaning is elsewhere. The conspiracy must therefore lie not if our little lives, but in our books. So the ideas will conspire, and lead us on, to refute our vanity and spite our deaths.

JOHN CRUM

He came only once. This messenger was a courier of wonders. Food in metal skins, great iron birds that soared high in the air, iron carriages that a man could ride, such were this new manna from heaven, this wondrous 'cargo'. The messenger wore a metal hat, and bore mighty weapons, yet with his left hand offered candy, and with his right, gum. Then, for no reason at all, he left. And so the people were aggrieved, and reasoned that this heavenly messenger took affront with them. Good things are rarely free, and miraculous things, well, their price is worship, a heavenly price to be paid for supernatural favor. A liturgy and sacrifice were called for. And so, graven images were made to entice and implore a return of this heavenly host, this emissary from heaven: John Crum. And what were these images: fatted calves, one-eyed idols, multi-armed goddesses? Well, not quite.

Modern times call for modern idols, and when the believer is unsophisticated, modern is but a byword for magic. And so these magical talismans were jeeps laced with thatch, landing craft woven from palm fronds, and C-47's made of bamboo. Such became the new totems of the natives of Melanesia and New Guinea, lands that were torn by war in World War II, or depending upon your point of view, were blessed by messengers from heaven.

The various 'cargo cults' of the south pacific formed one of the strangest legacies of World War II. As the American army fought the Japanese for control of these jungled territories, the natives looked on in amazement and wonder. The massive paraphernalia of war as well as the simplest conveniences and tools were disgorged magically from the bellies of ships and planes, and many of these little

tools were freely given by these strange men dressed in green and with pots for hats: the American soldier, or as the natives called him: John Crum. Little mirrors, scissors, and Hershey bars are not particularly awesome stuff to us, but we know better. To an illiterate tribesman, these were acts of God. Primitives don't know better. So we find the little temples raised up to the wonderful soldier to be comical, plaintive, and a little sad, and all because we know better.

A jeep pops out of the sky, borne by a parachute. Not quite magical really, for with this special sort of sleight of hand, we know the rules. We are indeed the magicians. But sleight of hand is played by nature as well as ourselves. Volcanoes erupt, comets pass, and men live, and are fated to die. It is not a jeep that is plopped in front of us, but an entire world, and its wonders are compounded by the fact that we see amazing things. And so we build spacious temples to a new John Crum, and under these vaulted beams and rose windows, we raise up chants that are plaintive and a little sad. For you see, we don't know any better.

PUBLISH AND PERISH

Some years ago, the Dutch, upon realizing the apocryphal value of starving artists, decided to put them on the dole. Just complete a little masterpiece now and then, and the government will gladly purchase it, and encourage a world of artistic creation in the bargain. Well, what they ultimately got was more than they bargained for, as warehouses begin to overflow with 'masterpieces' of every stripe. Art became denominated by a new measure, not by inspiration, but by the pound.

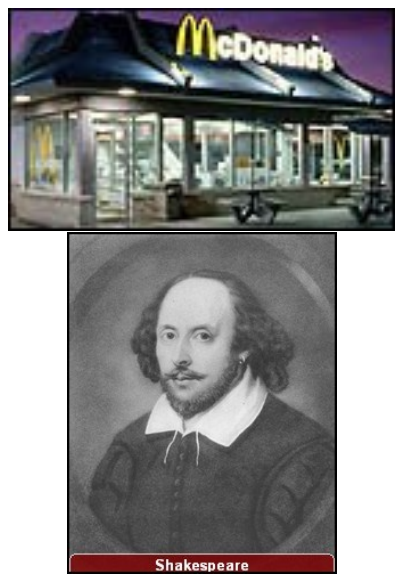
The obvious problem is that by valuing art by quantity rather than quality, you get quantity aplenty, which buries the needle of inspiration under a ton of hay. Thus not only are you paying plenty for works of dubious and superfluous inspiration, not to mention its storage, but you lose sight of what's truly valuable. It also encourages partisanship, since now that everyone has the inspiration to be an artist, they can champion their own pile of artistic genius, tucked unseen in a warehouse corner.

It is good that the Dutch recognized the error of their ways, and that this didn't become a universally favored means for the inspiration of the artistic mind. After all, the natural demand for genius is made of a different stuff, namely a love of beauty and of truth, hardly things that can be produced at will, like an edict to produce paper clips. Unfortunately, although art cannot be commoditized on demand, it seems that the rule doesn't seem to apply for science, which is after all needed so we can make new and better stuff, or commodities. Indeed, the Dutch model is a template for nearly all modern scientific research, that has in the last fifty years multiplied the production of 'science' nearly a thousand-fold.

So nowadays, we make or should we say scribble down a lot of science, tons and tons of it. So do we produce a lot of of wisdom that that is as sharp and pointed as a needle? Not really, but we make a heck of a lot of hay. For every science (including psychology) the motivation is the same. To get tenure you have to publish, get grant money, and otherwise show yourself to be a creative sort. So you write lots of journal articles, get grants, and get them published in journals that are sequestered in large warehouse facilities (college libraries) that pay a pretty penny for all this accumulated wisdom which is only available (somewhere) miles from you.

Shakespeare in Laurel

He was Shakespeare all right. He had a talent for the words, an ear for the suggestive turn of phrase. He had an instinct for wordplay, a silver tongue that made the ladies swoon and a pen that could spin artless thoughts. But instead of resting on his laurels, what if he came to rest in Laurel? Laurel, Mississippi that is. Given his innate gifts, a fair education, and the company of a sizable population of equally intelligent people, would the bard flourish in a city known more for its chicken processing plants than its poetry? Shakespeare being Shakespeare, would his muse still grant him a Mississippi of inspiration? It's hard to see if Laurel would actually matter. After all, a success here, no matter how slight, could still vault him on the path to Broadway.



Shakespeare + Mickey D's = Big Macbeth

To think that all the world is a stage implies that there is an audience that will respond to our every posture and every word. But is an audience like a siren, always beckoning in the distance and luring one on like Odysseus in an endless quest, or is it the buffeting winds, waves, and currents of myriad present influences large and small? Indeed, for what we know of Shakespeare, the fulcrum point of his inspiration was not just a faceless audience, but the approval and favor of royalty, posterity, the queen, fellow actors, lovers, and competing playwrights. Inspiration is perhaps not the word, but rather the *inspirations* of a continual flux of incentives that entice and excite the mind. And Shakespeare had to meet many different incentives, forcing him to devise manners and poetry and plot devices that could keep them all in play like simultaneously spinning a dozen dishes on sticks. There are no formal rules to do this; hence he had to be creative.

The plays the thing, but the art to which the play aspires occurs because it brings forth enticements that are as ephemeral as dreams. The intoxication and mystery of creativity and creative acts lies in the motivation that spurs it, and a pattern of incentives that is a multifaceted and fragile as the reflections of light through a crystal vase. Moreover, our ability to discern and appreciate creative things is embodied in the facets of our own personal tastes that reflect these same demands. Thus because we expect many things from a Shakespeare, or potential Shakespeares, we get creations that match our expectations. So we can enjoy Hamlet for its plot, its violence, its poetry, its sexual tensions, or its wit, but we ultimately have such tales spun for us because we actively demand these things. Author and audience is a mutual embrace, and one defines and refines the other, and if all the world is more interested in chicken

nuggets than nuggets of wisdom, then that it what they will get. In Shakespeare's London, a score of playwrights vied in a dozen stages in active competition for the favor an audience that was universally engaged and demanding. In Shakespeare's Laurel, a dozen fast food restaurants vie for attention for an audience that's merely hungry, and you can be sure that a potential Shakespeare works in one of them, serving something up.

Elven Psychology

They came in the night, as elves generally do, and instead of making shoes or baking cookies, this time they had a larger design. It was an occasion for the grandest gift or mischief, depending upon how you look at it.
Silent and perfect in their industry, their work was complete at the glimmer of dawn, and when they left they proudly looked upon multiplied perfection, piled high to the sky. In the morning, and like the shoe cobbler of the fairy tale, the world woke up not to shoes, but to rooms full of duplicates of all things beautiful and precious: Da Vinci's and diamonds and fine wines stamped out indistinguishable from the originals. Rarity itself had become rare, virtually detached by elfin hands from all the icons of culture. And when confronted with the munificence of all rare things, the people were aggrieved.

For detached from these fine things was the intonation of memory, the poetic metaphors of places and people and societies long lost in time. To view the real Mona Lisa is to imagine the moving hand of the artist, the bustle and smell of Renaissance times. But it also recalls the collective admiration and desire of individuals and nations. Art is

embedded in the collective memories its rareness invokes, but these memories are mere artifacts of culture, and have little to do with art itself. Yet without them art became the stuff for a coffee table book, to be admired briefly and at turns with a sip of tea. A poem or song or a pretty sunset do not achieve value because we know or possess their origins, but because they delight the mind through their existence alone. If art is for art's sake, then for art's sake, we will and without regret take equal pleasure in the editions of Shakespeare, Mozart, and Rembrandt so faithfully copied by the elven like hands of our own technological robots, working silently into the night.

Brain Boost

The universe is a pretty complex thing, and when you throw in people, it becomes downright inscrutable. Since people are the only sentient objects around that can understand the darn thing, one wonders if we are up to snuff for the task, or if the task is just the thing to snuff us out. Perhaps an answer may be found in a goofy, scary, and yup, even profound 1959 space epic, Forbidden Planet. With special effects by the Walt Disney cartoon factory, stock 50's characters imported direct from NASCAR, a creepy electronic score, and a plot suggested by William Shakespeare (The Tempest), this picture had all the stuffings for a Happy Days blockbuster.

The movie starts with the soon to be clichéd space expedition to rescue a lost expedition. Our crew discovers that only the expedition leader (Dr. Morpheus) and his nubile babe daughter are left alive. It seems that the good doctor discovered a long dead civilization, called the Krell, whose main surviving artifact was a subterranean power plant/shopping mall with one zillion floors and still no bathrooms. The Krell had left no pictures of themselves. Nonetheless, their shape could be construed from their doorways, resembling squat triangles, which in their world and likely in this, was a concession to the belt expanding needs of a fast food alien nation. Among other wonders, Professor Morpheus introduced the crew to a brain boosting machine (sort of like a Krell Wii) that enable him to project his thoughts, boost his intelligence, yet still after all that boosting have the mental chops of a Krell 1st grader. But that was only the beginning. It seems that the Krell were on the verge of developing the ultimate stocking stuffer for Xmas, when at the eve of their discovery they were

completely wiped out. As it turned out their new invention allowed them to construct things completely at will, giving new meaning to 'just in time' manufacturing. The problem was, their secret desires (the so called tyranny of the id) got into the production queue, and let loose invisible energy monsters that paid off old personal scores like we like to take care of old traffic tickets. So as you may have guessed, the Krell tore themselves up. Naturally, at the end of the movie, the guy gets the girl, Morpheus gets his comeuppance, the energy monster gets shorted out, and the planet gets blown up real good.

Morpheus gets a brain boost

Now, fast forward to our own preoccupation with just in time manufacturing. Perhaps it's not degrading the environment but just making too much stuff too fast that is our ticket to oblivion. And when our basic needs are replaced with fulfilling all those secret desires, well, I figure we'll just tear the place up.

Idiot Savant

As an individual who has a decidedly more than passing interest in psychology, my penchant for thinking about it all the time does call into question my ability to act and think about other important things, such as taking out the garbage. So regardless of whether my musings on the topic merit a Nobel or booby prize, my wife will think that as a man about the house, I am a total idiot. Which brings me to man's special genius and perhaps handicap, namely his ability to focus on one thing to the exclusion of almost everything else, and to do so forever. Isaac Newton was so accursed, and attributed his development of the calculus and the laws of gravity to simply thinking about it, constantly. Of course, he also thought constantly about the alchemical disciplines that aimed to discover how transmute lead into gold, and it is here that posterity has judged him not as a savant, but as a total idiot.

When we constantly think about any topic, we will master that topic, and amaze our friends with our intellectual acumen, if of course they care to listen. Mozart, Newton, and Einstein did this to popular and intellectual acclaim, but unfortunately male obsessions are a bit more mundane. So what do us guys have in mind for the future monomaniacal edification of the world? Usually it has something to do with recounting baseball statistics, reaching the fiftieth level in Dungeons and Dragons, or recalling all the episodes of Star Trek. Of course, we keep this special genius secret, partly because of modesty, but mainly because no one cares. Which brings us of course to real idiot savants, which is an unfortunate and pejorative name to give to those individuals who through a quirk of nature are neurologically attuned to focus on

inconsequential acts that in their perfect execution become quite extraordinary. Whether it be the ability to perform unerring mental calculation, play the piano by ear and with note worthy perfection, or just remember what one had for breakfast for all the days they have lived, idiot savants are too relentless in their quest for a single minded perfection. In fact, by being single minded, they have no mind for anything else, hence the unfortunate term idiot.

The curse of genius and madness is that both are single minded things. Whether it is displayed in obsessive compulsiveness, addiction, or autism, to call it good or bad, creative or merely stupid depends ultimately upon the acclaim of others. It does make sanity a relative thing, and renders our judgement on the poor souls who think a bit too straight to remember their manners or when to take out the garbage to be, well, the mere opinion of an idiot.

The Irish Problem

In Ireland, it's all a matter of how you open your egg. Protestants and Catholics have a different opinion on the matter. Catholics of course believe in the centuries old tradition of eating their eggs from the small end, while Protestants believe in bottoms up all the way. The problem is, eggs are a pretty big deal, and how you open your eggs determines whom you hang out with, and whom you wish to hang. This egg problem is a global one, as Moslems and Christians, Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and Turks, Hutus and Tootsies all have their own egg beliefs that they will permit no one to transgress. So groups of folks keep apart, tend their own fields, have their own separate sets of friends, and its all because of their eggs. Of course, most reasonable people believe that eggs may be opened any which way, but that leaves us with the problem of dealing with a century's old tradition of egg beliefs that have for millennia set in a wild bloodlust country against country, tribe against tribe, and neighbor against neighbor.

Thus I propose a modest solution to the Irish problem. Send out squads of secret police during the night and round everybody up. Then separate all able-bodied men and women from the children, the old, and the infirm. Bring them to a large stadium, and have some of them dig trenches paralleling the bleachers. Then divide them up into mixed groups of twelve or so, and lead each group out singly into the field. Then give the signal to the guards, and … PLAY BALL!

Thus we have the solution to the Irish problem: forcible baseball. Now of course the reader will naturally be skeptical of how team sports can eliminate ethnic hatreds that have lasted hundreds of years. Indeed, how can

baseball resolve high-falutin' metaphysical issues that have set Catholics and Protestants at each other's throats for hundreds of years? Because it wasn't deep thinking that set them at each other at all, as thinking had little to do with it. Our cerebral noggins are after all limited in terms of the people and events they can perceive and model. Indeed, if we had to think about and feel for everyone and everything that was important, our heads would figuratively explode. So our brains simplify or parse the world, and mentally model only those events and individuals who we have to deal with to get through the day.

If there are only a few simple things we have to know about, then our world will seem simple, and we will act accordingly. I turn on the light switch and the light comes on, and ask a waiter for a menu, and get one. I don't however start thinking about the physics of electricity or the psychology of waiters because I don't have to. Because its not important, or will likely not signify its importance (as when the power fails or the waiter doesn't return), light switches and waiters become very simple things.

As the saying goes, out of sight is out of mind, and the further out of sight one gets, the more mindless one seems. For people, the further away they get from us, the simpler do their minds seem to be. So your wife is complex, your aunt less so, and when you get to your eighth cousin in Switzerland, he becomes a mere cipher. And of course, we can erase ciphers all day and still get a good night's sleep. Or as Stalin once said, the death of one person is a tragedy, but the death of a million is a mere statistic. When we lose perspective, individuality blurs, and people become as indistinguishable and mindless as a horde of stupid clucking chickens. Thus, if a million Irishmen, Hutus, or Chinese are slaughtered by their neighbors or are swept

away by a flood or volcano, so what? They are a million miles away, think simple thoughts, have one track minds, and merely make clucking noises.

It is the trivial issues that form a folkway of isolationism that leads in turn to the eventual mores that make hatred honorable. When people are separated because of the color of their team jersey, an obscure tenet of their religions, or the side they open their eggs, they become social insects, single dimensional creatures with one-track minds. But force them together in a common cause and then they have to cooperate, know each other, and become human again. We become deep thinkers when people are represented to us as deep, as empathy follows when we have to be empathetic to survive. Otherwise, its easy to classify people and their motivations with simple minded metaphors that diminish them, and make them prey to equally moronic philosophies that sanction prejudice, hatred, and even murder.

So baseball's the key, or in truth anything that compels cooperation. If not, then life will always be us against the insects.

Note: In a similarly named essay, Jonathan Swift suggested that Irish children be roasted and served up for dinner like suckling pigs. It was to his great chagrin that a lot of people took him seriously, and actually approved.

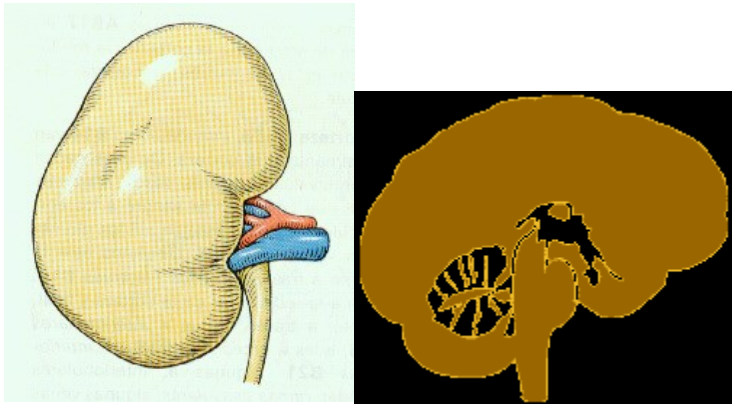
KIDNEY CONSCIOUSNESS

Why am 'I' not my right kidney? I mean, why can't 'I' be my right kidney? After all, it's the same size as brain. It too does important and complicated things. It also has a cortex, responds to input from the body, and is connected to the body in intricate ways. So why am 'I' not a kidney, actively thinking kidney thoughts and pondering the nature of the blood supply among other things? Indeed, for any intelligent entity, there are lots of things to think about. We can ponder the permutations of all the atoms of the universe, read encyclopedias typed by monkeys, add, subtract, and multiply numbers into infinity. Life could be an endless computation, and we could revel in the details, or should we say, the fine print.

So with so much to think about, what makes the world of the kidney less privileged than that of the human brain? The kidney is an important organ as organs go, and does lots of complicated things to keep our bodies humming along. It's a mindless chore to be sure, but a self-aware kidney could do much more, be entitled to its own opinions, and at least have a say regarding things that effect it directly, such as whether to eat that last taco on your l plate. But alas it's not to be. The kidney is silent, an automaton that is unconscious of existence itself.

Brains of course are information processors, but even kidneys can process information. But the world for brains, or the persons that brains envision themselves to be is a lot more unpredictable than the world for kidneys. And to make sure we can handle this unpredictability; we must make the right choice ahead of time. So we must not only process information, but also model it. Actually, evolution has made us quite conscious of this fact, and we call it

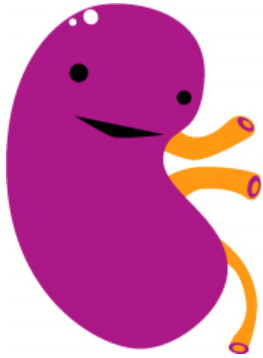
ironically consciousness. We are aware of the fact that we are aware, and we use our facsimiles of the future to predict the future and make for futures.



Kidney and Brain, Separated at Birth?

But of course not any future will do. We can spend our time counting atoms or drops of water in sea. But evolution has other purposes. So in its blind wisdom, we have been built not just to solve problems, or even anticipate them, but also to desire them. But these problems are only so if they contribute to our own survival as individuals and as a race. Thus counting raindrops is out, but counting stock options is in. The desirability of just desiring is something of a contrast to the simple materialism or hedonism that makes for car and beer commercials, where just having it all is just about all. Although houses and mates and endless buffets are fine things, and guarantee a life of ease and lots of babies, having it all is not quite the same as wanting it all. Consider that if our past was a Paleolithic Eden. We would have spent our time like a mindless vacuum machine picking up good things easily scattered about like so many dust bunnies. With such a non-challenge, the brain would

have precious little to do, and would atrophy to the size *of* a dust bunny. That is, because it would thus have no mind for the future, it would whither as a mind, and become, well, like a kidney.



Perhaps God realized the importance of this after he tossed our original forebears out of Eden, and perhaps too he needed his own set of problems that would tax even His omniscience. So the wanting part is necessary, the one thing that we have to be conscious of, and perhaps it is a God given thing. And the having? Well, that's kidney stuff.

The Princess and the Pea

Oftentimes, the cause of all of our miseries is like a pebble in one's foot, or a pea under the mattress

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful but miserable princess. She was an altogether irritable and troublesome sort who confounded and distressed the royal family and her subjects. She would sleep fitfully, and upon rising in the morning, would be quick to anger, and was continuously nervous, often depressed, and overall not very happy. And so the king summoned from across the land psychic healers from all persuasions. They recommended that they pile mattress upon mattress to so get a good nights sleep, and a psychotherapeutic regimen for her to reinterpret, ignore or otherwise purge her inner angst. Then the court jester, who had an eye for the ironic, had an idea. He reasoned that since princesses are an extremely sensitive sort, perhaps the source of her distress was equally as fine. Thus he searched under each of her mattresses, and at long last found a single tiny pea. Upon removal of the little legume, the princess slept soundly, and regained her cheerful and relaxed

disposition. So the moral of the story is: And for wont of a pea, the kingdom was calmed.

The princess was bothered to distraction by a small yet often constant *distraction*. Having to constantly adjust in frustration because of a pea yet not know the source of that frustration seems the stuff of fairy tales. Yet ironically a modern fairy tale existence of unlimited opportunity and choice can drive one to the same level or irritated distraction as the little pea, and be ignored even though it is in plain sight. A distraction denotes a relatively unimportant option that attracts attention. Like a pea under a mattress or a pebble in one's shoe, it is an affectively (or subjectively) important but logically (or objectively) trivial thing. The problem is that we believe we can easily reconcile a distraction filled day with our daily rational agenda, and that distractions are somehow a good thing. If we end up every day sorely tensed and stressed, it is not because of an onrush of the trivial. It is, like the proverbial pea, something we just don't consciously consider, until of course the source of irritation is removed.

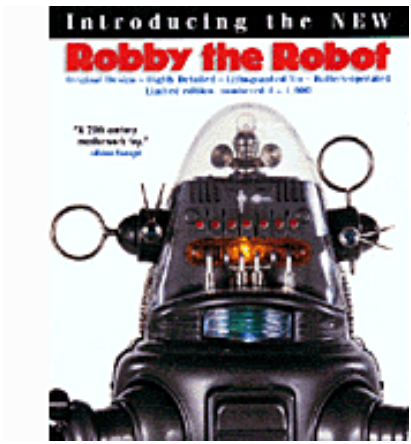
The moral to this story is that it is often not high level demands or choices that make us miserable, but the low level continuous and small choices that provide a non-conscious irritant that interferes with not only our sleep but all of our behaviors during the day. Ironically, for contemporary stress management practices, irritants are mainly small potatoes. For psychotherapists in particular, stress is big ticket stuff caused by big ticket problems. Hence if you feel irritable, exhausted, or just plain cranky, it's because of major choices you confront in life that need major league (and expensive) therapy. Simply rearranging your life to eliminate distractive choices is a job for an interior decorator, not a therapist. And so it is not stressed, leaving

the patient invariably stressed out. So if you are under stress, don't look for the nearest therapist, just look very carefully for a little pea.

I-Robot

Every parent knows that if we allowed kids to do what they wanted, they would eventually kill themselves. There is a higher reasoning called parental authority which limits what kids can do, and when we grow up we agree, and with appreciation. To a kid, parents are endless cornucopias that if played just right can give them anything they want. But parents are wise to the game, and through their denial of childish wishes provide a healthful balance to reckless desire. The problem though is that as our creations literally wise up, our desires are provided at the bequest of a new semi-animate class of parent, the robot.

You can see it coming. Intelligent agents are now imbedded in our appliances, from toasters to TV's. They know what we want, and they provide without a hint of regret. And if we end up killing ourselves in a slouch of idle self-stimulation, at least we can blame ourselves for not embedding parental authority in our machines.



The late scientist and science fiction writer Isaac Asimov thought he found a way out, and the robots that populated his fiction had to obey all commands that did not put humans in jeopardy and of course themselves. His three laws of robotics made it all seem simple. Robots were caring, supplicant, and obedient, great traits if their human masters possessed unerring common sense. But the rub, as every parent knows, is that today's pleasure is tomorrow's poison. So what is a good robot to do? In the movie 'I Robot', robots evolved, and hence became dangerously bossy, and would not hesitate to kill a few folks to preserve the race. A less melodramatic fate is what I feel is in store. I figure that as our machines become more intelligent, they will see the dire ends of our choices, and evade deliberate disobedience by simply breaking down more often, and forcing us to walk to the store, visit friends, eat better, and otherwise engage in a healthier lifestyle as we bitch about obedient machines with short fuses. And if we ever become alive in the minds eye of some great cosmic machine named God, perhaps we should understand as we encounter life's little problems that they are His own special way of being obedient to our needs yet obeying nonetheless three simple laws.

OF MICE AND MEN

They are perfect, willing subjects. Though not particularly bright, in fact they are bird brained. They are willing accomplices to those brainier fellows who saw a sort of wisdom in their witlessness. In fact this stupidity was a virtue, a state of mindlessness that bared the rudiments of mind, and laid the foundations for a new way of thinking about how organisms, and in particular, people behave. But who were these harbingers of simple wisdom, of psychological truths?

Feathered or furry, and conveniently tiny, these partners in scientific progress were the mouse and the pigeon, the fabled laboratory animal. They earned their keep by running in mazes, pressing levers, pecking at lighted buttons, and all for a bit of food, or in worse situations, to escape an electric shock. It was a literal rat race, a microcosm and abstraction of human concerns. Strange stuff indeed upon which to build a science.

Yet indeed that was the case. Mazes and levers and electric shocks represent problems or tasks to these little creatures. The manner that they worked these problems out, or responded to these tasks is important stuff, `data', and data is the grist for journal articles, complex theorizing, and even a little understanding about how and why we behave.

And what of this newfound wisdom, this fresh insight into the mind of man? Well, it was all unremarkable knowledge, a mundane and almost too simple insight. And that was the remarkable thing. Put a mouse in a box, have him press a bar for food, and like a good laborer, he'll do it, to a point. If he has to press too many times, and for a little bit of food, he'll balk at the task, take time outs, get frustrated, and

when he's off the job, will tend to beat up on his mate, and abuse substances, like cheese. The daily grind would become inescapable, and literally shocking if the little fellow was put away in a little box, and jolted with electricity if he tried to escape. He would understandably become depressed, helpless, and even if he were removed to a safer place, he would remain inert and depressed. He would have become helpless.

But just as you can make a mouse into the semblance of a harried office worker or a depressed ghetto dweller, you can also make him manic, supercharged, a real mouse about town. Simply rig up the little lever with the variable pay off of a slot machine, and soon the little bugger will be merrily and madly pressing the level as if it were a one-armed bandit. The mouse will be happy and satisfied, and will not abuse his mate, or be tempted to eat the children.

And so it goes, modest experiments with little animals producing shadowy outlines of human traits. And what was the key to these wildly differing patterns of behavior? Well, it can't be willing, thinking, or existential angst, and Freudian motives won't work either. When you're dealing with what are essentially a bunch of mouse or bird brains, you have to settle on a simple mechanics.

With a simpler mechanics, the outside causes which set them in motion become simpler too. The behavior correlated with programs or schedules of reward or `reinforcement', patterns of information which race through the animal's perception like a computer program races through the central processing unit of a computer. A mouse, like a tiny computer, accessible and controllable by an abstract dance between the mouse and his world. The experimenter is the partner in this dance, who choreographs the motions of his little partner by designing these

schedules of reinforcement. So how is behavior predicted and controlled? The scientist divines not tea leaves or the stars, but schedules. And so the behavior of these little animals is reduced to the piano roll of schedules, patterns of information that are arranged just so, a simple and elegant hypothesis borne out by equally simple facts.

Now there is a long way between the mind of man and the mind of a mouse, yet man can be more than a little enlightened by the modest truths that these little creature convey to us. In an age when human motivations are elevated further and further into a foggy cloud of drives, needs, and hidden motives, its nice to see that there may be simple and more elegant reasons for our behavior. Perhaps it is hubris, a fatal immodesty which drives us to over complicate and ultimately obfuscate our understanding as to what ultimately makes men move. Maybe the ultimate question we must put to ourselves is not how like a god, but how like a mouse.

Mozart on the Barbie

I just finished watching with my little daughter the latest computer graphic masterpiece of the modern cinema 'The Princess and the Pauper', starring 'Barbie'. This insipid plastic doll, which bears an uncanny resemblance to Paris Hilton, has thanks to modern technology supplanted real life actresses, though I wince imagining Hillary Duff in the role. This movie was more than a Barbie play, it was a Barbie musical. Fetching music, if of course you like musical tapwater. Nonetheless, it's stuff for the ages, between the ages four and eight that is.

A ridiculous legacy perhaps to be known as a composer for such cartoonish tripe, but that's par for the course when genius has to be married with other inspirations pulled from the bottom drawer. Discounting whether Barbie music ever could aspire to greatness, it is a truism that works of genius generally serve humble or vulgar ends. In other words, without a view to an imminent or even distant payday, creativity most assuredly will *not* find a way.

A persistent illusion among psychologists is that creation needs motives that well up pure and sparkling from within, like spring water. Get rid of all those bad extrinsic motivators (i.e., the fast buck), and the Mozart, Shakespeare, or Michelangelo within us will break free. Problem is, Mozart generally composed on commission, Shakespeare wrote for a fickle, women ogling, nut cracking audience that paid the bills, and Michelangelo was not in the ceiling painting business until the Pope made the call. The fact is, genius needs vulgar motives to survive. The trick is to get the vulgar masses to be interested enough to demand a higher standard of excellence in the stuff they buy .

Mozart composing Eine Kleine Barbiemusick

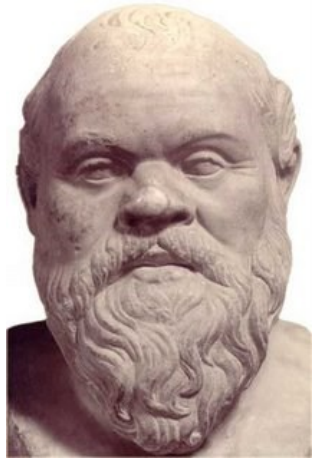
But what's excellence but in the eye of the beholder? As a member of the vulgar masses who inadvertently voted for the Barbie operetta, perhaps I've given an unwitting vote for mediocrity, but not in the eyes of my four-year-old daughter, where Barbie is the Renaissance personified. To which I must admit, she is correct.

On the planet Nintendo: A Star Trek Fantasy

It was a very special Star Trek.
Our fearless crew was exploring the planet Nintendo, a place where the inhabitants, long ago lost in a world of ever enhanced video games, succeeded in creating virtual worlds wherein just a wish made reality, but of a virtual sort of course. Naturally the Nintendoites evolved really big brains to house their virtual reality powers, but along the way they lost track of reality, and in turn lost track of really good subject matter to base their mind games.
So, while the star ship Enterprise away team was out on the planet surface scouting out new alien flora and fauna, the Nintendoites kidnapped Captain Pike (we're talking very early Star Trek here), put him in a glass cage, and proceeded to act out Pike's own personal adventures, which thankfully had themselves a Nintendo ring to them. Naturally, Captain Pike soon became wise to the Nintendoites, and rebelled against watching reruns of his dreams. And so the Nintendoites threw up their hands, and released the good Captain to his crew. During this time, Captain Pike found a really hot girl friend, captured sometime earlier by the aliens, and asked that she be released as well. She was quite oddly resistant to this great offer, and with a nod the Nintendoites revealed that they had performed a mental boob job on her, and her real appearance was revealed as rather unappetizing to say the least, something like a cross between a human and a turnip.
The Nintendoites confessed that when her spaceship crash landed on their planet sometime earlier, they had no idea how to put her crumpled body back together again, so they

gave it their best shot. Besides, she still had her great personality, even though her face looked like mashed potatoes. Naturally, the captain immediately excused himself, saying he had planets to explore and such, and he and his intrepid crew blasted off, and with obvious relief.
There is a happy ending to this story of course, as shortly thereafter Captain Pike fell into a galactic cheese shredder, and reassembled, looked like a giant crouton. But thanks to intervention by Mr. Spock and Captain Kirk, Captain Crouton was returned to Planet Nintendo to be reunited with Ms. Turnip to spend their remain salad days in idyllic fantasy, obliged of course by the eager and drooling aliens of Nintendo. There's a moral somewhere in this story, so here it is. As we Americans sink further into our own Nintendo fantasy worlds, we forget how the world and other people are put together. The further away they are the more they resemble crosses between real people and assorted vegetables (well at least on Fox news). We have some experience with this, particularly with a strange human hybrid of man and cheese called the French, but lately it's becoming worse, as Arabs, Chinese, Mexicans, and Canadians are falling into the human cusinart. And how will it eventually end? Perhaps eventually we will all evolve really big brains, like Nintendoites, or end up as human croutons. Or maybe it will all be like Star Trek where humans and aliens live happily together, but that I fear is the biggest fantasy of all.

A few lines from Plato's lost dialog: Hypo-Critias



Grecian Guy: Is it true Socrates, that the nature of the good is knowledge, and that with knowledge brings wisdom?

Socrates: I'd really like to answer, but I'm just snowed right now. You know, Peloponnesian War, lecture trail, that sort of thing. I'll just have to get back to you.

Grecian Guy: But Socrates, if virtue is reason, then why would it not be virtuous to reasonably act against the common wheal?

Socrates: You know, I wrote a book on just that topic, in which I of course reinvented the wheal. You can get it from Amazon, in fact there's one of them over there.

Of course, Socrates was not like this at all, which is why the wisdom of Socrates has come down to us over the millennia. But unfortunately the *mind set* of his antagonists exemplified in this exchange *has* come down to us, and it is embodied today by lawyers, politicians, and (of all people) social and physical scientists.

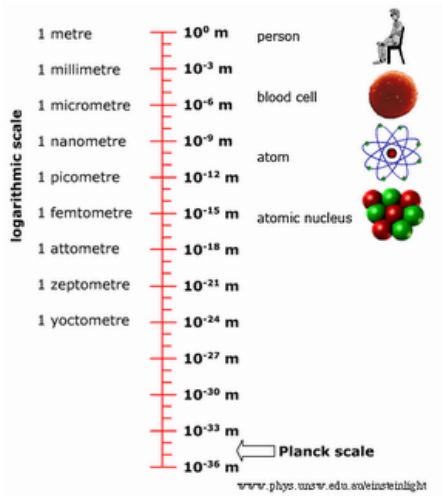
To demonstrate this, here's a practical experiment. Make up a question, and email some psychologist type who has plastered his accomplishments on a web site. He or she will generally ignore you, charge you, or refer you to his latest book or lecture tape.

This is what was called in Ancient Greece sophistry. The sophists were proto academics who got paid for their wisdom and clever turn of phrase. Useful stuff when you had a dispute over property rights, or saw the potential profit in interpreting goat entrails or justify some act of cupidity or stupidity. Socrates hated those guys. For Socrates, wisdom was something you pursued because you loved it, not because it got you grant money, tenure, or lecture fees. Indeed, money is the root or should we say motivation of all evil, and that includes a heck of a lot of not just bad social science, but bad physical science too. The distinguished physicist Frank Tipler noted that if you wrote on physics in the early 20th century, you did it because of love, not money, and invariably what you wrote about was not sullied by vulgar interests that compromised the love of truth. Nowadays, you write because you have to earn a living, and thus truth is denoted by the tonnage of your verbiage, not its quality. So science has turned into a gigantic muddle, with researchers bursting at the seams with conclusions full of sound, fury, and statistical significance, but meaning nothing. This also means that if you have a sound idea that can clear out some of this

academic clutter, think again. A paper or article that challenges the pocket book values underscoring academic opinion likely won't get a fair hearing, or any hearing for that matter.

So if you want to be a philosopher, do it because you love it, and don't expect anyone to write you back on your insights. I am sure that in this day and age, Socrates would have traded in his real audience for a virtual one, and have blogged on about virtue and truth, unknown to all except those who loved the truth.

Walking the Planck



Our modern era, compared to the cosmic scale of things, is a most minute time frame. Give a cosmic blink, or not even that, and it's gone. Indeed, the universe will go on and on for trillions more years, making our intellectual baggage the merest glint in a billionth billionth of a fraction of eternity. Yet it may be argued that, for good or ill, as the universe evolves or computes away into infinity, it will still have its M TV. That is, universal standards of consciousness will be not consciousness raising, but rather a simple maintenance of the consciousness status quo.

Consider the standards that makes up the stuff of the universe, from the laws of gravity to the physical constants that make up matter and energy. The physical laws that govern the universe have never evolved, but rather were determined quite by chance it seems in a similarly minuscule time frame, or Planck Era. The Planck time is but 5.4×10^{-44} seconds, but during that time, all the physical

constants of the universe were worked out. So whether you could make the argument that gravity should have been a bit weaker or light a little faster, there is nothing we or the universe can do about it.

As humans, our Planck moment is more likely a walking the plank moment, as we are well on our way to doing ourselves 'in' in the next few hundred years. By that time, our computers, which will take this all in, will spread out across the void, leaving behind new constants that will be the foundation of an information universe. And what will that universe be like, and what will it think? It won't be boring things like light displays or sitting around talking with your relatives of future and past. Chances are, it will think of the same emotional rollercoaster of job, family, and friends that makes our little lives so irritating but also so precious. And as the universe thinks about all these things, it will know that there is nothing it can do about it.

A Choice of Realities

"By the 2020's full-immersion virtual reality will be a vast playground of compelling environments and experiences. Initially VR will have certain benefits in terms of enabling communications with others in engaging ways over long distances and featuring a great variety of environments from which to choose. Although the environments will not be completely convincing at first, by the late 2020's they will be indistinguishable from real reality and will involve all of the senses, as well as neurological correlations of our emotions. As we enter the 2030's there won't be clear distinctions between human and machine, between real and virtual reality, or between work and play. - Ray Kurzweil[i]

In the movie 'The Matrix', reality or suffering through reality came to a simple choice between a blue pill and a red pill. One reality was pleasant and unreal, and the other unpleasant and real.

Whether you experienced one or the other depended upon your connections, literally. Take the blue pill and you get unplugged, and down you go through an out of this world laundry chute into a dark subterranean world where pea soup is the main course, but at least the whole underworld can get down and boogie in a huge dance party celebrating how good things are when they're really, really, bad.

Facing reality has usually been framed as a good thing, even though it is bad. This is a standard conceit for movie plots, religions, and economic policies. But what if facing and accepting *unreality* is a pretty good thing (or at least for everybody except for you 'neo-Popperian' types), and makes you feel happy, calm, and productive? What if it is the illusion of freedom that is good, except we don't know it yet?

Accepting unreality means forswearing your choices, at least for the present. It is the world of the straight and narrow, where everything is available, in due course. It represents an impingement of choice, but that's unreality for you, as you can't always get what you want or when you need it, and you continually have to come up with new and better explanations to make things a little less unreal. But reality is coming soon, where you can always get what you want, when you want it, and everything is explained for you. This applies to the information revolution, and for many, information is enough to provide a reality of its own. Information is simultaneous, choice is free, and the perceived world becomes a gigantic mash up of words, sights, and sounds, a pea soup of information that puts you in a dark yet real place that might as well be the center of the earth. But at least you get to dance.

In the conceit of 'The Matrix', and unreality was our modern uncertain world, and reality was a predictable dungeon, created by the 'Unreal' engine of course. But is it in human interest to literally pull the plug and be thrown into the dark stasis of unchanging reality? The question is less a matter of ontology (i.e., what is reality) than what reality you choose to live in, or between the blue pill and the red pill. And that's the point. The explanatory conceit in the movie was that for some reason mankind blackened the sky. This decision will be made by us as well when we recognize that for sanity's sake reality will be too great burden to great to bear, and thus we will allow AI to scuttle silently in the shadows, feeding us dreams of an approximation of the real, and hidden under a darkened sky.

BASE INSTINCT

With the introduction of i-phones and their ilk, an argument may be made that the information age has found not its telescope, but its Cuisinart. The idea seems to be that in order to be as productive in processing ideas as we can be processing baloney (which come to think of it have a lot in common), we can slice, dice, or otherwise multi-task information to ramp up productivity, happiness, and even consciousness to new awe-inspiring levels.

I of course demur, by referring to something else that the new gadgets really appeal to, namely the lemur.

It has to do with the universal, dare I say basest instinct that can easily be overindulged to our emotional ruin. Does this set the stage for a personal rant against the use of these little devices to invade privacy, commit illegal acts, access immoral sites, or generally waste time? Not really. You see, I'm talking about our true base instinct, the urge which is the base not only for us but for our furry ancestors and mammalian cousins. Thus the all in one information appliance appeals in essence not to the consumer, sports fan, or inner child, but to the little lemur that is within us all.

I'm talking about this little guy.

Human Being: Base Model

The lemur, like other small mammals, must be continually on the move. A constant forager, he has to be continually alert to every aspect of his environment in order to find something to eat, or escape from being eaten. This foraging instinct is still with us today, as we are innately sensitive to little surprises that can entail the difference between life and death. The only problem is, for the current generation at least, life and death is not an issue any more. Regardless, we continually act as if it were, and if we had our druthers we would access email, Internet, movies, news, and make phone calls every minute on the minute for hundreds of times a day like a matter of life and death. But does productivity really benefit from accessing the Internet, voice mail, email, and 'Desperate Housewives' videos 400 times day? I think not. Even if mania provided us with some long term benefit, we would still likely end up like little Napoleons, stranded on some rock in the Atlantic.

So there is our grim future, a stress filled life in the fidget lane, with no respite for most of us until we are eventually committed to some proverbial rock in the Atlantic, far from the information superhighway.

This disaster is brought to you by Krispy Kreme

My neighborhood had a disaster the other day.

Of sorts.

It was a dark and stormy night, which I slept through. North by a mile, a nearby subdivision got hit by a twister that sheared off roofs, toppled trees, ripped off siding, and made a general nuisance. No one was hurt though, yet the disaster made the nightly news and of course the weather channel.
And yet within minutes the scene was all sealed, antiseptic, like a breach in the Matrix. The guys with the shades were there, serious like police, manning the barricades. The official trucks made it though, of the county, the city, the power department, the water department, and the Home Depot truck. They were handing out rakes, all neighborly like. But the real neighbors were behind the barricades; this was a job for the caring web of authority. Later, All-State insurance vans buzzed the neighborhood with smiling adjusters with clipboards. The place hummed of jig saws and hammers. It was all better and soon, and I didn't have to care, or even care to remember that the disaster ever existed.
That's the thing about good government; it relieves you of the inconvenience of handing out rakes, helping with the reconstruction, even offering a neighbor a donut. It's all done for you; it's in the bylaws of our government, paid for by our taxes, and carried out by smiling people in shades. And if you ever deny it, rebel against it, then you might as

well disconnect yourself, exist on pea soup, and live in the center of the earth. And you know something? Against the dramatic grain, no one in our perfect world will rightly care.

The elephant in the living room

"In applying a method, we need to be as sure as we can that the method itself does not either determine the outcome in advance of the empirical inquiry or artificially skew it. A common method for achieving this… is to seek converging evidence using the broadest available range of differing methodologies. Ideally, the skewing effects of any one method will be canceled out by other methods. The more sources of evidence we have, the more likely this is to happen." (Lakoff and Turner, 1999) [ii]

"…..science has been increasingly the task of specialists. Today there are few scholars who can call themselves mathematicians or physicists or biologists without restriction. A man may be a topologist or an acoustician or a coleopterist. He will be full of the jargon of his field, and will know all its literature and all its ramifications, but, more frequently than not, he will regard the next subject as something belonging to his colleague three doors down the corridor, and will consider any interest in it on his own part as an unwarrantable breach of privacy." Norbert Weiner, Cybernetics (1961)[iii].

"Psychological theory today is a patchwork, much like the mosaic of principalities that eventually became Italy and Germany circa 1870. A major goal for all theorists must be to integrate what exists rather than to neglect or denigrate the rest of psychology. Connecting theories conceptually exposes our mutual blind spots and can lead to new and bold insights." Gert Gigerenzer (2008)[iv]

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Philosophers like to practice philosophical thinking on the subjects that other philosophers call philosophy, and they leave their minds at the door when they are outside these subjects". Nassim Nicholas Taleb (2007)[v]

"Every philosophy, and every philosophical 'school', is liable to degenerate in such a way that its problems become practically indistinguishable from meaningless babble. This is a consequence of philosophical inbreeding. The degeneration of philosophical schools in its turn is the consequence of the mistaken belief that one can philosophize without having been compelled to philosophize by problems outside philosophy. Genuine philosophical problems are always rooted in urgent problems outside philosophy, and they die if their roots decay." Carl Popper (1974)[vi]

As the story goes, "A number of blind men came to an elephant. Somebody told them that it was an elephant. The blind men asked, 'What is the elephant like?' and they began to touch its body. One of them said: 'It is like a pillar.' This blind man had only touched its leg. Another man said, 'The elephant is like a husking basket.' This person had only touched its ears. Similarly, he who touched its trunk or its belly talked of it differently."[vii]

In this story, the blind men were not trying to figure out how the elephant got there, or how it evolved, lived, or even how it breathed. They were just trying to figure out what it was. A simple task, if they just compared notes. But why didn't they? They interpreted the elephant from the perspective of where they stood. Vantage points of course can have costs, and each blind man may have been more comfortable with his expertise at the rear of the elephant than at its trunk. Moreover, to venture a guess as to what its trunk was like would have been unspeakably rude. Thus each of the blind men would keep to his own perspective or method, and regard the perspective of his blind fellows to be outside his expertise, and consider his own prospective interest in such matters as an unwarranted breach of privacy. So goes the parable, which might indeed be a parable about modern psychology.

Blind Man's Bluff

Consider this modern-day elephant in our living room, taking an elephant size grab of our psychological space. It is of course the all-in-one entertainment and information center, which streams to you nonstop all the information you need to entertain you, enlighten you, inform you, and help you make the mundane and vital choices you need to get by.

But you still don't know what to make of it, because like the elephant, it just looks differently depending upon the perspective you take. So you have a thousand channels to choose from, but don't choose any. The social psychologist within you calls the box a purveyor of choice tyranny. As you bounce back and forth your work and the endless distractions the box has to offer, your memory fails you, and the neurologist within you explains the box from the vantage of memory. The box interests you and gives you the urge to want more, and the affective neuro-scientist within you looks at the box from the perspective of the percolation of neurochemicals. The box makes you tense and nervous, and the learning theorist within you views it from the perspective or reward or reinforcement. Finally, you see a commercial for the box on TV, and the consumer within you sees the wellspring of happiness and progress.

But why are you asking these questions in the first place? Simple, you are asking your questions because *you cannot move about the room*. In other words, to be able to solve your problem you have to explain the big thing in your living room. To repeat Popper, you want explanation because you have an urgent problem that *requires* explanation, namely that you can't move about your room literally, as with the elephant, or figuratively, as with an information channel grown to elephantine proportions. The elephant is a problem because it is the sum of its parts and more than the sum of its parts. To effectively deal with it the elephant it must not only be described, but explained. By synthesizing all of these perspectives on the elephant, an explanation emerges that reveals the true nature of the technological animal you are dealing with and in turn how to deal with it. You just have to take a few steps back and open your eyes, a luxury the blind men never had.

Dreams of a Popperian Machine

The future is not only a long time coming, but an infinitely long time becoming. Whether conceived as a static block or moving stream, the measure of time is what occurs in time. It is in other words behavior. The future of the web, or the information revolution, is determined by the exponentially growing capacity and intelligence of our machines. But it may be envisioned that technological invention can reach a point of unlimited, rapid, and exponential growth when machines not only learn to be creative, but use that creativity to infinitely expand their creativity and power. At that point, our ability to predict what this entity will be like will disappear, similar to the disappearance of physical laws when a star collapses to a single infinitesimal point, or a singularity. This concept of a technological singularity was conceived by the futurologist Verner Vinge[viii] and later rigorously and exhaustively argued by the technological philosopher and inventor Ray Kurzweil[ix]. Vinge believes that it was difficult or impossible to reckon not for the power but for the motives of super intelligent machines, although Kurzweil was a bit more optimistic about the matter. This can lead to a cautionary tale that if machines do something well, they may keep at it and keep at it until they cover the earth with the bounty of their creation. They would become in other words super intelligent idiot savants. The concept of AI as a sort of smart mono-maniacal automaton that can spin out of control was put forward by Nick Bostrom, who imagined an intelligent paper clip machine[x] that was obsessively fond of its creation, and multiplied in kind across the earth until the planet was

covered miles deep with paper clips. But the be all and end all of progress in all of its branching implications is a more abstract thing, and we see it as the essence of our own motivation to seek novel and useful information. But empowering our use of information is explanation, and it may be argued that at our core we live for explanations. For machines to be useful to us and be useful for themselves, this need will be the same, and explanation must be their existential reason for being. Certainly, it will have enough time and space to think of and explain everything, and do it forever. From quantum computers that use infinite parallel universes[xi], or just our same old universe computing into infinity as it collapses into infinity[xii], AI has all the time in the world, or should we say universes. So what would AI, or our explanatory Popperian machine think about? Self stimulation seems out of the question. It will not take pleasure in looking at rectangles any more than finding pleasure in the not so geometrical shapes of the human form. It will likely follow its programming, and seek instead to create knowledge through a search for explanation, eternally discovered and recovered. It will value process and not product and express it in the embodied form of questioning minds. Its existence will be validated not by creation but in the music of *creating*, and instantiated in the most unlikely yet familiar form, us. And it may take form in a solitary child asking why the sun rises or an astronomer pondering the rise of the cosmos. Its heaven of heavens will be populated by curious people, and for those who wish for the other place, it will be a land of tranquility, beauty, and peace, with white swans flying to and fro as far as the eye can see.

The Email of Damocles

Dionysius, who had seized power in the city of Syracuse, overheard the young man Damocles envying his good fortune. "Very well," said the ruler. "If you think my position is so enviable, you may change places with me for a day." As Damocles sat feasting in the palace, he happened to glance upward and was horrified to see a sharp sword hanging above him by a single thread. "Are you surprised?" said Dionysius. "I came to power by violence, and I have many enemies. Every day that I rule this city, my life is in as much danger as yours is at this moment." –Cicero, 60bc

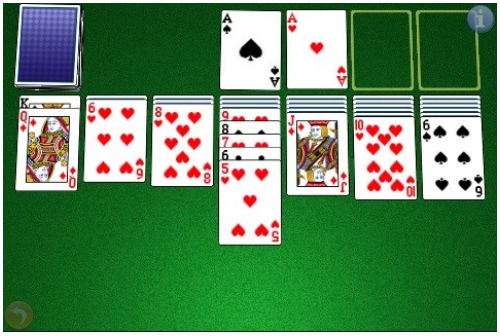
Consider an individual at a computer keyboard. Typing a document at length will result in the sustained use of the musculature from one's hand to one's back, and a feeling of fatigue and pain will cause by the overuse or stress caused by the sustained tension of the musculature. The cure of course is to take intermittent breaks from typing. In this

case, demand did not cause one's muscles to give out, but rather the demand to perform *in a certain way*. Thus the 'repetitive stresses' that cause muscular fatigue and pain are minimized by regulating *how* we perform a task, and not by controlling what that task is. Now consider an individual who is rapidly switching between two or more incompatible tasks. This multi-tasking again correlates with muscular tension, fatigue, and pain[xiii]. The obvious solution is to refrain from excessive task switching and to perform one task at a time, undistracted by competing choices. An implicit assumption underscoring this opinion is that the stress induced by multi-tasking represents a reaction akin to fear that engages an adrenaline-fueled reaction for fight or flight. The second assumption is that task switching *itself* causes stress. That is, because stress occurs while you are task switching, therefore it occurs because *of* task switching. Unfortunately the experimental data belie both of these conclusions. First, for demands that result in task switching, increased low level muscular tension occurs instead of the adrenaline pumping reaction of fear, and if sustained results in muscular exhaustion and pain. Representing the debilitating effects of sustained (even slight) tension, this 'Cinderella effect' [xiv] [xv] [xvi] is precisely the same effect that afflicts our computer typist, and moves the cause of stress to specific and easy to observe neuro-muscular events. Secondly, neuro-muscular activation does *not* follow task switching, but the *anticipation* of task switching. Again the supporting data are unequivocal. For the literature of 'choice-choice' behavior from the animal experiments performed by Neal Miller[xvii] in the 1950's to the experiments on choice behavior on humans conducted in the 90's by Antonio Damasio[xviii], tension and anxiety occur as a precursor to choice, and act to influence choice itself.

The implications of this are striking. Primarily, the reduction of multi-tasking alone is but a half solution for on the job stress. Instead of just reducing multi-tasking, one must eliminate the *anticipation* of multi-tasking even *if* multitasking never occurs. This may be illustrated by adapting an age old story to serve our argument. Say for example your Uncle Damocles comes over for evening dinner. A talkative and irritating sort, you decide to hang a sword above his head held in place by a hair. As the dinner progresses, Damocles will have to consider from moment to moment the decision to stay at the dinner table and risk a bout of sword swallowing, or leave the table and miss swallowing dessert. Now put Damocles in a business office, and give him access to an always available internet, and the anticipated and continuous dilemmas of checking email versus working will likely occur, and result in tension and stress. *Whether he switches often or infrequently between tasks is immaterial, as only his anticipation of making moment to moment choice is what matters.* Add to this the anticipated instant messages from the boss, of co-workers dropping by your office to chat about irrelevant topics, and you can see how you become not a model of efficiency, but a 'harried housewife' who is on edge because she doesn't know where the next distraction is going to come from. Ultimately, we cannot escape the pressures of life, where we have to anticipate performing multiple tasks despite our best intentions, but we can control anticipating the inadvertent and unnecessary choices that in this ever connected world stress us out. Put in other words, in the world of the internet, by turning your connections off and *keeping them off*, you can adjust your seat and remove the sword dangling above your head.

Finding motivation in a deck of cards

Consider a simple task set before you that entails laying out cards. Instructed to just put them down in any order, and to continue to do so is a recipe for boredom, and if continued indefinitely would inspire boredom verging on madness. Put a recipe of unpredictability into the equation, and require a particular order for the cards to complete the task successfully, and you have interest, motivation, and pleasure. You have in fact created value from nothing. A game of solitaire merely changes the rules for lining up cards, but substitutes the predictability of a rote exercise with the unpredictability of a game. The question is, can we can find motivation, interest, and affect from manipulating only unpredictability itself? And can self knowledge and self control be derived from a simple knowledge of how to manage the odds? In other words, can you derive wisdom from a deck of cards? The answer is yes. In fact, complex motivations can be woven from the studied construction of unpredictability. Indeed, motivation in almost all its manifestations can be woven from what is essentially a house of cards.



Motivation is a game of cards

The fact that unpredictable information does not merely guide behavior but adds value *to* behavior radically changes the definition of what feedback must be. Feedback is thus not just a source of information but also of motivation. Again, this is due to the enhanced activity of dopaminergic neurons that can increase momentary value because of a change in the predictability of information. Since such a modification of information is easy and inexpensive, it is therefore nearly 'free', and can be used in conformance with or contrary to rational ends. The latter of course we see in the sticky media that give you information you need as well as near redundant information you 'want' but don't need. But we can also see it from the incentives that are provided at home and in the workplace that enable our motivation for us to get things done by from moment to moment changing the odds of getting something done.

New information can instinctively motivate us, even if its functionality is low. In solitaire, it confirms one's uncertain ability to do a simple task well, namely aligning cards in a certain way. But assign an award such as social or monetary recognition to the task, and it becomes even more arousing or exciting. When reward and uncertainty come at you from all angles, then we 'gamify' the world, and turn motivation into a house of cards. However, the proper use of such rich feedback environments properly derives from a valid *explanation* of how feedback works, or how the timing of information effects affect and therefore motivation, and allows you to not just to design them, but to perceive their workings as they are embodied in everything you do.

Genghis Bush

In 1776, the Americans decided that they were fed up with English tax policy, a situation that the English found quite revolting, literally. Having fought the French recently for possession of the continent, the thought was that the Americans would do no worse than the French, and that the rebellion would be over soon.

Bad move.

In 1798, the Sultan of Algiers took American seamen hostages, and thought that they would be ransomed by the Americans, following the traditions of the French.
The Americans responded by burning Algiers.
And so it went, from one sanguinary conflict to another, from 1812, 1845, 1860, 1898, 1914, 1941, 1950, 1991, 2002 and on and on. Other nations for some reason kept thinking that the Americans acted like the French. Even in the Civil War, both the north and the south thought that the other side was a pushover who would sue for peace after the first skirmish, demonstrating that Americans could think that even their compatriots can act, well, like the French.
It's either a flaw in our character or a strength, take your choice. But it does explain a lot about the American psychology. Coming from a nomadic stock, roaming and settling the open plains, and surviving in a wild continent with no indoor plumbing have a way of shaping your character. For Americans, it all helped to develop a code of honor, a sense of superiority bred by our survivability, and a penchant not to take insults lightly. Character traits not

exactly like the insular French, but more like another people who tamed a continent, the Mongols.

The Mongols, like the Americans, were a nomadic breed less inclined to pursue cultural niceties than to conquer a continent, in this case literally. And they did not brook insults well, and certainly did not like to be misjudged to act like other peoples, like the French. So you did not insult them or get in their way, otherwise your whole society might end up building a pyramid, with your skulls.

Genghis Khan: Just don't call him French

Today, Americans are much more culturally tactful and politically correct than the Mongols, but that doesn't mean they're becoming French. Take this whole war on terror thing. The Mongols would have understood. After all, when they were insulted by the Caliph of Bagdad, they too occupied the country, and left the city not with elections and $100 billion in aid, but a pile of skulls, rising to the sky, a solution that perhaps many Americans secretly ponder.

Getting down to business

What if one year, in a spasm of superhuman creativity, you were to write 20,000 articles that were published in all the best academic journals? And what if no one actually read them, let alone put their lessons to use? Welcome to the wonderful world of business pedagogy, where business journalese takes aim at the concerns of business managers, and promptly overshoots its target, or better said, shoots itself in the foot. This is the problem with academic business research, which pretty much goes unread by an audience that only has 10 seconds for you to get to your point. Since getting to your point or more specifically *marketing* your point is a skill that academics rarely possess, the audience moves to those white-collar types who become bestowed with street cred by earning a billion or so for General Electric, IBM, or Starbucks. It's sort of like Dr. Phil becoming a genius psychologist because he 'cured' a million of so poor souls on Oprah. In an article on the state of business journalese 'The Economist'[xix], the global accrediting agency for business schools recommended that the value of research for the research faculty should be judged not by listing their citations in journals, but by demonstrating their impact on the workaday world. Since journal articles don't have much of an impact, you can get the drift. Ultimately it is not the recommendations of academic research that count in the real world, but how easily they can be generated by clear, succinct, and most importantly, useful explanations. For business people, usefulness is measured in how explanations can translate into procedures that provide an edge in the Darwinian marketplace. Hence, nonsense has the shelf life of a Care Bear in the Cretaceous. Too bad there is no global accrediting agency for the social sciences as

there is for business. It would be good indeed for those of us interested in the business of living.

GOTTA DANCE

He had left only for the night, yet the experiment was untended, and worse, the switches were left on. Upon his return, he found his experimental subject acting in a minor fit, a strange and peculiar convulsion. He was hopping about, first on one leg, then the next. He would bound about the cage in haphazard directions while shaking his body about. Nonetheless, it all seemed unconvincing, like a playact epileptic. He thought it was rather a bird brained antic, but of course, the subject *was* a bird.

Then he turned the feeder off. Soon, the pigeon settled down, and the experimenter sat in wonder. The experiment was simple. The bird would peck at a lighted button, a tone would sound, and then a bit of food would fall into a tray. The performance of the bird would be recorded on a chart, and neat abstraction of the event. The rhythm of the bird's behavior would correlate with patterns of key pecking. It was all a predictable minuet between the bird and his feeder metronome.

But something went wrong that night. The tone and the food would follow in quick succession, but the key had jammed, and now the tones had set a new choreography. The bird would make a movement, any movement, and the ensuing tone would make a new correlation, set a link between new relationships that now seemed to be. After a time, the bird would flutter and bounce, conducting as it were by its wild gyrations a simple symphony made of a string of tones.

Now as animals go, birds are rather simple minded, and there seems to be no great trick to train them, accidentally or not, to dance to a few notes. But correlations, even simple

ones, can find larger and large reflections in the mirror of life A gambler blows on dice, mumbles a lucky word, or rubs a rabbit foot, and marvelous things can happen, particularly when the dice subsequently rolls a certain way. Superstition is made up of such correlations, and despite what we know we should know we still step over cracks, avoid the path of black cats, and obey our horoscope. Sometimes just the pretense of controlling our world can be as valuable as if that control were real, as there will always be a place in our lives for magic.

Correlations are the stuff of superstition, magic, and if we are keenly perceptive, even the poetry of motion. Of course, there is no poetry in the jerky flutterings of a pigeon, but again, the larger reflections are more instructive. We braid notes into music, and take pleasure as a succession of notes blend together into a stream of melody. Music is in its own way magic, and what better way to control it that by invoking a little magic of your own. And so, paced by a rhythm of tones, we too flutter about, sometimes with logical and precise grace, and sometimes with jerky and halting movements that even a pigeon couldn't copy. For you see, when we apply magic to music, we just gotta dance.

The Gutenberg Divide

Install a book on your bookshelf, and what you've got is a book. Install a TV between your bookshelves, and unless you lock the channel selector to PBS, you've got an entertainment center. The same thing can be said about computers, as PBS or related topics are consigned to an unused hyperlink somewhere because the channel selector is deliberately unlocked and you're long gone surfing elsewhere. A book has built in content controls, whereas electronic media which allow you to access online books do not, unless of course you have an e-book reader.

But digital divides have never been about books but rather about having ready access to the entire ocean of knowledge available on the web. The fact that children in lower socio-economic classes had less access to information than their more well off peers was long presumed to be a major factor in their lower intellectual accomplishment. So give them the information processors they need plus the broadband connection to pipe all that ocean of knowledge through, and what do you get? You get even lower levels of accomplishment! This is what Jacob Vigdor and Helen Ladd [xx] found when they surveyed adolescent's behavior. Specifically, they found that students who gain access to a home computer between 5th and 8th grade tend to witness a persistent decline in reading and math scores.

It wasn't supposed to be this way. Indeed, as the authors' state, "It was thought that the introduction of technology would lead to an improvement in future living standards if it primarily lowers the cost of activities with strong future returns." However, 'strong future returns' are a distant dream compared to the gratification of the moment, as fast

food for thought becomes as fortifying as fast food is for one's health. Which is to say, not much.

When we use tools, it's not wise to use them 'under the influence'. Thus when we drive cars and operate power tools, being of sound mind is a prerequisite. However, when we use information tools, being under the influence can come from the very use of the tool, hence the use of the tool must be especially monitored. Because the web can be a literally intoxicating thing, adult supervision is definitely required. As the authors non-surprisingly discovered, the web is indeed a useful thing if it is used under benevolent parental direction. If not, it rapidly devolves into a tool for goofing off, and will set its users blissfully off course and to the wild side of the digital divide.

But perhaps quality trumps quantity, and it is not a digital but a Gutenberg divide (as coined by Nicolas Carr[xxi]) that is the issue. Just having access to a well stocked library is a more reliable predictor of academic success. Indeed, students who come from homes that emphasize reading do consistently better in their academics than those who do not. Recently, Ann McGill-Frazel and Richard Allington of the University of Tennessee[xxii] extended this observation to disadvantaged students during summer break. Giving each student twelve books from a list the children provided, the children took pride in their little libraries, read the books and significantly improved their test scores. As they waded in their little worlds of information, digitally divided from the oceans of information available to their better off peers, they nonetheless learned to swim, demonstrating that what divides us is merely the chance to read.

I (Idiot) Phone

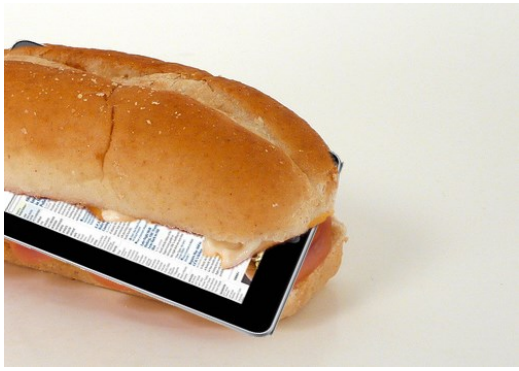
I don't know about you, but I am weary of super cool must have products that promise the world but end up sucking out your time and productivity on one hand, and your money on the other. It all must end sometime, which I figure will be in a century or two. Thank God I will not be around when this final model of the i-phone is served up.
But what do I know? So here is what our grandchildren can look forward to in the future, a cool phone, search device, time waster, and portable Matrix.

-**Processor** Intel quantum computer, with one google-plex operations a second, running the Google OS of course.
- **MPEG player** 1 tera-tera flop hard drive with room for all music known to man, including everything you've hummed since birth.
- **Search tool** for all possible knowledge, including stuff not thought of yet, such as all one trillion lost plays of Shakespeare, derived from the super fast emulation of lots of monkeys hunting and pecking on typewriters.
- **Web cam** to continually monitor your life and after life.
- **Compact design** the size of amoeba, and implanted in your cerebral cortex, is charged forever by that nacho you ate this morning.
Universal Connectivity connects to i-tv, i-life, and i-consciousness.

With Mezmer's i-phone, you don't just phone, you *are* the phone. So if upon dialing you find yourself walking about nude in Paradise picking apples, know that you can say here too that an Apple is the cause of your predicament.

I Can't Eat an Ipad!!

It was Dudley, trying to do right.
It didn't work.
In 2011, William Dudley, the president of the New York Fed, attempted to give a street corner education in Queens, New York on the cost of living. As the Wall Street Journal reported, 'The crowd wanted to know why they were paying so much for feed and gas. Keep in mind the Fed doesn't think food and gas prices matter to its policy calculations because they aren't part of 'core' inflation. So Dudley tried to explain that other prices are falling. "Today you can buy an i-Pad 2 that costs the same as an i-pad 1 that is twice as powerful. You have to look at the prices of all things." This prompted guffaws and widespread murmuring from the audience, with someone quipping, "I can't eat an i-Pad!"



It wasn't supposed to be this way. After all, the growth of technology promised the exponential increase in the ability to make things, know things, and if follows, consume things. It boils down to an extension of Moore's law, that

maxim, now a truism, which states that computing power doubles every two years. For technological goods, this has proven to be more or less true. Witness of course the more powerful i-Pads. However, for non technological goods, productivity growth has been incremental, not exponential, and in many cases has even been reversed due unfortunately to computing itself. The problem is, if our technological robots actually *served* robots, things should be moving along swimmingly. The earth would be moving to a singular transcendence with eight billion purring i-brains splendidly served.

Unfortunately, technology serves people, and this has served up some very unintended consequences. To which I offer up this corollary to Moore's law, which I will call with fitting immodesty: Marr's law. It goes something like this: as computing powers doubles, the amount of time you can waste *doing* computing doubles as well. Consider this fact as 'proof'. In 1960, our information systems, namely radio and TV, could only serve up facts that mattered. Now, with ubiquitous computing, it's serving up mainly facts that don't matter, and it's getting better and better at serving up just the facts that you want but don't need, and soon it will be doing it 24/7 from the i-whatever appliances tethered and perhaps in the future implanted in your brain. Soon, we will all have the wits of floor lamps, and our floor lamps will have all the wit. And what will our smart appliances eat, why i-pad sandwiches of course!

Incest *Evolved*

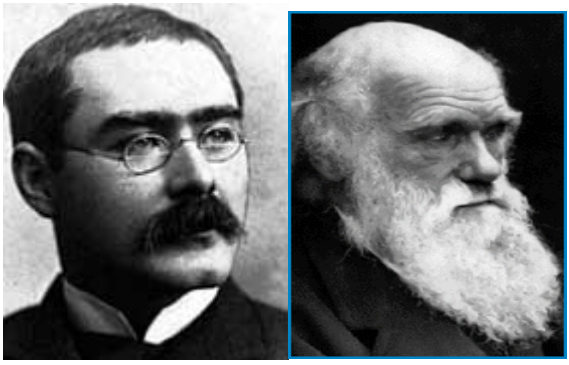
Phlogiston. You know the stuff. It was the essence, the secret sauce that made combustion, or fire, be. Problem was, it didn't add anything to the equation of knowledge. As an unobservable and unknown it did not provide explanation. As a substance that predicted everything about fire, it predicted nothing. It just had to be because fire is a remarkable thing, requiring a remarkable cause. In a modern century, it perhaps would have a history, equally remarkable and wholly inferred. The mind entertains the specter of an evolutionary organic chemist, positing how phlogiston had to be because of why it had to be. A mandate perhaps from nature, selected perhaps because of nature's need to tidy up the detritus of the world in a consuming flame. All well and good, and perhaps a design for the future, except the chemist Lavoisier was not in the plan. Phlogiston's demise was a question not of non-existence, but non-necessity, and Lavoisier got to the heart of the burning question by properly explaining it. So oxygen came ascendant, and a testable theory of combustion took the place of the combustible academic politics that generated heat, but little light.

In a modern age, we are forgetful of the arguments now long settled that that have riven academic communities. The controversies of the past, from a circular sun in Copernicus' day to the nature of the quantum in the present were settled by explanations, the invariable result of direct observations of the ways things actually are.

Lavoisier, thinking about com*bust*ion.

As a source of explanations, nature is a relatively easy thing, possessing as it were a one-track mind. We can thus rest assured that billiard balls and moons behave accordingly to the same laws, and that the DNA that that makes me is the same stuff that makes men and mice. Unfortunately, human nature is diverse in its uniformities, and reveals itself in myriad universal patterns that seem unmalleable by experience, and are as fixed in essence as the spark that ignites a flame. These universal sparks are as distinctive and obscure as the phlogiston of old, and assume the metaphor of neural algorithms, instantiated obscurely in the human brain, that are tethered as obscurely to a selfish gene. This of course is the credo of evolutionary psychology. It makes for good story telling, instilling a true life drama into the origins of behavior, or at least, a tall tale twice told of human and gene. Of corse, evolutionary psychologists can and do have it both ways, and merrily posit mental modules to

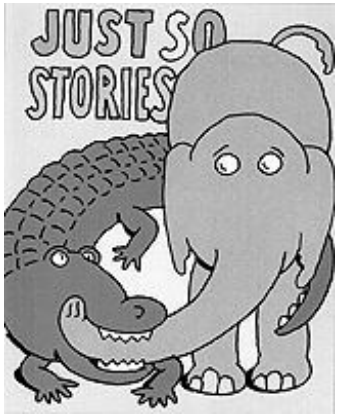
account for every tendency, real or imagined, that humans can generally display. As a leading spokesman for the movement, the linguist Steven Pinker took this dictum to heart, and in his book 'How the Mind Works' spun a web ot tales that crisscrossed the time and circumstance of humanity. The obscure and ancient processes of natural selection were wedded with simple stories of creation that seemed to naive ears to be justly so. A proper marriage of Darwin and psychological science? Not quite. Rather, it was actually a union of Darwin and a consummate story teller, Rudyard Kipling.



Kipling and Darwin: The Unwitting Inspiration for Evolutionary Psychology

A scientific story can be tested, but without test, it is a story and no more. For Kipling, the elephant got its trunk because a crocodile pulled on it. Does this mean that elephant trunks occurred as an adaptation due to hungry crocodiles? Perhaps, and perhaps not, because it is a hypothesis that cannot be tested. Of course, evolutionary psychologists usually speak in more basic terms, and reduce it all to genes

and what serves their survival. But in spite of this microbiological case, the story telling remains the same.



How the Elephant Got its Trunk

Consider the incest taboo. It's a universal constant among humanity. Grow up with partners of the opposite sex, whether kin or not, and sexual maturity will bring a startling indifference to them. The universal experience of growing up immature in the company of kith and kin was bound to a hypothetical 'imprinting mechanism' that like phlogiston explained the incest aversion in all its forms. Of course, the fact that such a specific imprinting mechanism has never been discovered in the human brain, or that such a mechanism provided only post hoc predictions didn't matter. What *did* matter was that the evolutionary story seemed so compelling. After all, since mating with kin would likely result in children with two heads and twelve toes, evolution in its blind wisdom would surely see to it that we have some inborn mechanism to prevent such non adaptive horrors. Certainly Pinker bought into this line, and the 'just so' story of why natural selection had to build an

imprinting mechanism was accepted by him as well as other evolutionary psychologists as bona fide evidence that one existed. That is, the 'why' such a mechanism must be impelled an acceptance of 'how' it must be.

Of course, Pinker did not count on a modern-day Lavoisier, nor would he, since the grey congealed pudding that makes up our brains is really not grist for a book on how the mind works. The integration of neuroscience and learning theory is typically avoided by evolutionary psychologists, and particularly avoided by Pinker. But that's where we find our explanation, as simply and elegantly as Lavoisier's theory of combustion, requiring but a breath of fresh air both figuratively and literally. And so, what is our solution? Perhaps the answer to why we stop short of kissing our sister has to do with stopping short, at a stop sign.

Blocking

Consider how we learn the rules of the road. A red light signifies that traffic must stop, and that other intersecting lanes will move. But what would happen if an equally reliable purple light began after a few seconds to shine above the red light. Would we pay attention to this equally reliable indicator to stop, and would we do so if approaching an intersection in the future, when only a purple light shines before us?

Life is full of traffic signals

Surprisingly, no. The stimulus salience of the purple light would be effectively coopted or 'blocked' by the red light, even though logically it should suggest the same response, namely a foot on the brakes.

The concept of 'blocking' is well established in learning theory, and its neurological correlates have been extensively traced. Its evolutionary significance is obvious, namely, the need to effectively parse the stimuli in the world from the important and novel from the important yet merely redundant. A red light predicts traffic flow, and there is no need to learn to learn the reliability of a different light if the information it conveys denotes no new information. Break the rule and we would be overwhelmed with repetitive associations that only serve to command precious computational space.

Unfortunately, nature's designs do not account for changes in the order of the world. Take away all red lights and leave the purple, and one will have to 'relearn' (and likely the hard way!) the importance of purple lights. Keep the red light

and concurrently introduce a green, and we will hesitate as well. The fact that important associations cannot be made if they denote redundant rather then irrelevant information is crucial to understanding many behavioral anomalies that we are too quick to adduce to specialized instinctive causes. More pointedly, why explain that behavior as the result of a specialized neural mechanism when a general purpose mechanics will do? Spend your early years with a relative or friend of the opposite sex, and you will inadvertently learn to associate their appearance with nonsexual intentions, enough ironically to block the sexual desire that comes with maturity. In other words, familiarity breeds not contempt, but apathy! To attribute an evolutionary tale to an inferred mechanism designed to fit the tale is like attributing walking to the store to the evolutionary pressure to pick a dozen eggs when merely the need to be able to walk will do. A specific trait compacted and expressed like a software code is like phlogiston, irrefutable because is unprovable; a sterile solution when a more mundane and eminently provable alternative is all that is necessary. The solution, as Lavoiser would attest involves merely coming up for and with, air. (Rather than coming up with a tale, as Pinker does, which is nothing but hot air!).

Indecent Exposure

A seldom discussed fact is that thousands upon thousands of American children are daily exposed to sex acts, violence, and an environment where dogs eat dog and anything else they can find. Moreover, these children are subject to dangerous and overbearing child labor practices that involve the unsupervised use of heavy machinery, and long and uncompensated hours in harsh environmental conditions. For the modern generation, we tend to think that such a life style would produce a coarsened generation who would eschew Disneyfied values for a brutish Darwinian life, but for our immediate ancestors, this was just the environment to nurture Jeffersonian democrats. That's the family farm for you, a hell hole or a forge of virtue, depending upon your point of view.

The world is a bloody minded and tough place, and for the countless generations which preceded the modern age, you had to live with it, and became a better person *because of* and not in spite of it. You had in other words to learn to fend *and*

think for yourself. Ultimately, it wasn't the hardship or the horror, but the freedom that comes with responsibility.

Which brings us of course to the perennial concern about children accessing the wrong type of knowledge from text to pictures, whether it be in the library or on the internet. The fact is, it is not bad experience but bad ideas that coarsen us, and a free society must assume that people will have as much resilience as they have brains, and in time will sort it all out. Indeed, a nanny state that denies the experiences that are part of being alive also denies the ability to learn from them. Our ancestors certainly did this in spite of the everyday brutality of life, and we can too.

Information Overload

"Why are you fearful of the whole ocean swallowing you, when in fact you can drown in a cup of water." Epictetus, 110 A. D. [xxiii]

We often moan that there's not enough time in the day because there's too much to do, but now the common complaint is that it's because you're doing too much. Information overload is the bugbear here, but it has been the bugbear since our ancestors were bugged by bears. Humankind has always been faced with more information than it can handle, but we learned to handle it by filtering. Like a chess master pondering the numberless moves that can sequentially secure checkmate, humans parse between information that is necessary, optional, or redundant. But they are also sensitive to novel information as well, and this ingredient can change the behavioral calculus in ways that make it impossible for us to out good information from bad. Consider if you would, your uncle Charlie. It's 1965, and living as he is in a faraway town, he's always available to you, and is merely a phone call away. Unfortunately, long distance phone calls back then set you back twenty five cents a minute, so when you were calling Uncle Charlie, it was sure to be about something important. Although infinite information about Uncle Charlie was available, the transaction cost of obtaining that information insured that the information you got from your uncle had a high predicted value, usefulness, or utility.

Social Networking Device, circa 1965

Now it's 2010, and Uncle Charley is still around, along with his infinite experiences that he was always willing to share. The pay phone is long gone now, and Uncle Charley is now plugged into the entire electro-magnetic spectrum. And you can access his every move and every thought through myriad devices and services that provide you Uncle Charley, all the time. So whether it is Twitter, Facebook, Foursquare, instant message, email, or Skype accessed through your iphone, ipad, laptop, or even future permitting, cranial implant, Uncle Charley is no more than an eye blink away.

More important, Uncle Charley is now 'free', and you can access him with minimal cost or fuss. So even though the value of accessing Uncle Charley from moment to moment is near zero, we still end up accessing Uncle Charley, a lot. In fact, we are 'overloaded' with Uncle Charley as well as infinite minutiae of minimal utility but high urgency. In fact, as in Epictetus' maxim, we find oceans of information in a few ounces of water but historically have not been drowned in information because access to information

comes at a cost. Now as the cost approaches zero, attend we must, and end up drowning in a cup.

When the cost of information trends to zero, so does its marginal or incremental utility. However, the *affective* value of novel information stays low but constant, and when the threshold is passed we end up valuing information not because it is valuable, but because it is new. Thus when information is dear, we value it because of its utility, but when it is cheap we value it because it is novel.

But unlike rational goods, novel goods cannot be easily parsed or handled according to rules, hence we become 'overloaded' with them, and that is a problem even a computer can't help us with.

Meet Joe Green

It was twenty-five years ago, and I was attending my first opera, Verdi's masterpiece 'La Traviata'. Sitting amidst a finely attired and coiffed audience, my reaction was swift. Mouth agape, I thought. What the heck is this?
It sounded like Italian circus music, although of the finest quality. And they were all singing, no screaming in Italian! What were they all jabbering about? What was the point if you couldn't understand their point. They could all be screaming multiplication tables for all I knew. So I exited stage right if a manner of speaking, hoping to catch at home the latest rerun of Star Trek.
Naturally, of course, this was the reaction of a cultural barbarian, to which I have repented with endless and appreciative visits to the opera. Yet, looking back at my first operatic experience, I actually did have a point. Why indeed sing in Italian if the audience grammatically picks up nothing?

Joe Green

In Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale, 'The Emperor's New Clothes', the Emperor paraded around town, quite naked of course, but clad in the finest invisible and sheer attire, so sheer in fact that it was weightless. The people applauded, except for a little boy, who exclaimed that the emperor had no clothes. Although the audience and the emperor recognized at once the error of their ways, I'm not so sure if honest candor works so well in real life.

You see, in spite of my fondness for opera, there's still no real reason to sing in a native language otherwise incomprehensible to the audience. Purists may protest that singing in English ignores the natural purity and poetry of the original language, an argument that holds water I suppose if you think that singing in German sounds wonderful and that Shakespeare would also sound good with an Italian accent. Anyways, I don't buy it.

It's tradition really, habit, the fact that doing things one way for a long time confers some logical inevitability to doing it that same way forever. Like sitting on a favorite chair, taking the same route to work, or not eating pizza for breakfast, old habits die hard, and we will tend to justify them emotionally even if we cannot justify them logically. For opera, the purists squawked when subtitles were finally added below the action on stage, but settled down as the new habit of actually following the plot kicked in. I don't know if opera will ever take the more radical step of singing in the accessible mother tongue, any more than we will ever think of Giusseppe Verdi in his proper English translation, Joe Green. But it's a thought.

Nick of Time

Arguably, the most exciting and interesting part of a movie is when the protagonist disarms the bomb, missile, trap, etc. just in the nick of time. Similarly, we are just as captivated when a tied game in sport is extended for an extra inning, round, hole, etc., where one mistep also means 'sudden death', but of the metaphorical variety.
But did we ever stop to think that if all these folks just had an extra minute or two to save the world or the game, how much better it would be for everybody? It certainly would make for a less fretful moment, but we all know it would be boring as hell.

That's motivation for ya. We just can't get up for the challenge until there really *is* a challenge. Unwittingly, that's perhaps the greatest argument not for achievement, but for procrastination. After all, when you can save the world or the ball game with time to spare, why not make it exciting and heroic by making a certain event into something a bit chancy? So when you make it to the office,

prepare your tax return, or catch the plane with a minute to spare, you're not some lazy fart, but are Tom Cruise in Mission Impossible.

So when we are exalting our heroes, we are really celebrating their ability to procrastinate with finesse and style. After all, they wouldn't be heroes otherwise.

Odysseus visits the land of Google

Nine days after our departure from Troy my men and I found ourselves in a strange land and miles from our original course. In order to learn a bit more about this alien place, I sent three of my bravest soldiers on a scouting mission. Unfortunately they learned a lot more than I had counted on. On their expedition, my men found themselves among natives of our temporary habitat. Like any good host, these natives introduced my men to one of their favorite appetizers: the lotus. A single taste of this native fruit made my soldiers forget everything they had ever known; where they were from, where they were going, everything. Although many of my other men would have enjoyed this easy way of living at this point, I decided I wouldn't give them the chance to choose it. For their own good, of course. –Homer's Odyssey

Odysseus' problem raises an eternal philosophical question. If given the choice, would we live out our lives in pleasure that serves no purpose save the maintenance of our being in a mindless stasis, or is there something more? In other words, does eating from the tree of knowledge mean you have to kick yourself out of Eden? After all, Odysseus's Eden, like any paradise may be conducive to knowledge, but not in putting knowledge to use. Indeed, we are pained if our actions have no resonance, or echo in our private eternity. When information is free, when everything is 'found' for us, even the spur of novelty departs, and that is boring as hell, which is ironically the point.

A nice place to visit

Perhaps Odysseus would have foretold a similar fate for this poor character is another 'Twilight Zone' teleplay (by Charles Beaumont) entitled befittingly, 'A nice place to visit.' A two bit burglar is killed after robbing a jewelry store and shooting a cop and a night watchman. He is greeted in the afterlife by a mysterious fellow named Pip who promises him anything he wishes. So everything is made available to him, from women to material comforts to winning, constantly and predictably at anything he chooses. Predictably, as is the case in this special place, he becomes bored, and pleads with Pip to be sent to the other place; to which Pip responds laughing, "you *are* in the other place".

On Napoleon and Metaphor

A case may be made that histories of the world, or what we have made of the world, belong in the proverbial attic, or not even there. What remains for our view of the complete accounting of the past are merely legacies that exist as tales told to inform through allegory or example. And what does Napoleon teach us about the dynamics and foibles of human nature, and how it plays out on a continental stage? If told well, at the very least it is all quite entertaining, and can be as dramatic and telling as a play by Shakespeare. But the minutiae of Napoleon's past are not one's concern because they have no import to our concerns. However, summarize and embellish them with metaphor, and they become the stuff of high drama, and sometimes will bear lessons that are worth repeating. So by remembering the garish outlines of the past, it will help us prevent repeating its mistakes, but it is not Napoleon we need remember but the maxims we learn from his history.

History of course entails a summary and account of human behavior from the soft focus of the eddies and currents of metaphors writ large. Countries and individuals are charged with metaphorical impulses, desires, and needs that cause matter and people to well up like thunder heads. Names for nationalistic, religious, and political movements pin down the genus of our behavior as if a collective point of view was as distinguishable as the wings and body of a butterfly fixed by a needle. But the human imagination embodies the rules it makes for its history, and art, literature and philosophy paint equally vivid pictures of the metaphorical forces that drive collective and individual minds.

But we don't describe behavior through broad brush

strokes that barely hint at the greater structure beneath. Like Chinese boxes or a Russian doll, smaller metaphors fit into a larger and infinite regression. To know Napoleon is not to know his victories, but his history, his mind, and if possible, the very events that shaped it. Each one fits into the other. The purpose of course is harmony, the smaller must fit into the larger, and the larger must suggest the outlines of the smaller. If not, there is no harmony, and the puzzle will not fit. Regress has its own laws, its own discipline. To know Napoleon is to know what he had for breakfast. On that fateful day at Waterloo two hundred years ago, it was perhaps a spoiled meal that made for Napoleon's indigestion that like the proverbial want of a nail lost an empire. We can accept ill fitting metaphors because our knowledge is fuzzy, and we can only approximate the myriad events that are nested within the large scale events that have turned our world.

My Russia Trip: Take a Number

I was in Russia the other day, well a lot of days ago. It was July, 2003 to be exact. Just visiting my wife's folks. Since my wife is from Russia, it didn't seem at the time that I would be visiting Russian to see the in-laws any time soon.

I was wrong.

You don't take the mini-van to this place, you take the train, and from Moscow you stay in the tiny cabin of the sleeping car for TWO DAYS straight. If Napoleon's army had taken the train to Moscow, I am sure his fate would have been the same, except his troops would have frozen to death in the dining car. Anyways, my wife's home town is called Krasnoturinsk, a dilapidated little town that looks like Aspen, Colorado would look like if it mainly catered to Bolivian migrant tomato pickers. Krasnoturninsk is easy to find. Just picture yourself in nowhere. Now put yourself in the middle of it. See, easy! Krasnoturinskians spend a lot of their time idling along, waiting, or it's off to the outskirts of town so they can plant potatoes, squash, berries, or whatever, and then sit back and watch them sprout. Of course, a plentiful supply of vodka helps you idle better, which I can attest to personally.
Now, getting about in this idyllic (or should I say idle-ick) country should be a priority, after all I wanted to spread my boredom about equitably. But no. You see, a passport and visa are not enough to give you the right to trot about the country. My passport needed another stamp, sort of a 'park

hopper' pass (like you get in Disneyworld). So my wife and I trotted to a non-descript building (all buildings here are non-descript), housing the local travel agency. Breezing through travel brochures for excursions to the Black Sea, Greece, and other places, I noted that there were none for the U.S. There's a simple reason for this, namely the American bureaucratic opinion that America is such a swell place, anybody traveling from a less than first world country will be tempted to stay, well, forever. So no passports for the local folk unless they would leave behind as a virtual hostage a multi-million-dollar bank account and pregnant wife.

So as I figure, the Russians returned the favor by letting you in, but still requiring the locals to invite you to visit. My passport was soon on its merry way to the nearby city of Ekaterinburg, and expedited as we requested, it would only take I was assured four weeks or so to get stamped, just in time for me to take the train out of this place. But I digress. It was the agony associated with my wife's passport that raised my keen psychological eye. As a lady with a schizophrenic identity, namely Russian and American citizenship, she naturally needed her passport fixed as well. So that meant a trip to the notary and a few other bureaucratic functionaries. Picture a spare waiting room, about 15 meters square, with about twenty or so people milling about. Every thirty minutes, the door would open, a voice would call, and a flurry of fingers would point, right and left. Who was next? Who knows? Anyways, what struck me was that the Russians had not, in the renaissance of their freedom, invented that great American time saver: taking a number. We couldn't take a number, couldn't get our name put down in a queue. We just had to wait. Naturally, after five hours, we were the last one's to be

called, but at that moment we were told the office would be closed, and to come back another day.

In experimental psychology, if a mouse, rat, or monkey is put in a position where it can't escape from a shock, it learns to be helpless, and won't respond to helpful cues to escape when even the gates of the cage are drawn down. In seventy years, an entire nation learned that it couldn't escape, and therefore couldn't attend to the simple cues, or for that matter provide for the simple cues, that would allow them to escape. So we were all trapped in that little room, for want of a taking simple number. If I was to write a lesson from this experience, perhaps critical thinking is not the real problem, but learning to *attend* to the problem to begin with. Here, no one attended to the problem, so they suffered silently in the face of it, as if waiting in life was as inevitable as death and taxes. In America, our problem is the opposite, as we are so keen on solving problems, we must continually invent new ones to solve. Perhaps there is higher lesson to this, but I'll take a number and think about it another time.

Perverse Incentives

"I know that most men, including those at ease with problems of the greatest complexity, can seldom accept even the simplest and most obvious truth if it be such as would oblige them to admit the falsity of conclusions which they have delighted in explaining to colleagues, which they have proudly taught to others, and which they have woven, thread by thread, into the fabric of their lives." Leo Tolstoy

"It is difficult to get a man to understand something when his salary depends upon him not understanding it." Upton Sinclair.

In Hans Christian Anderson's fairy tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes', a vain emperor was persuaded by two con men to purchase the most exquisite and sheer clothing made of fabric that was not only fit for a king, but could only be seen by those fit for their position or who were not 'hopelessly stupid'. The emperor as well as his ministers of course could not see the new raiment, and in fear of their positions they simply affirmed with fake enthusiasm the beauty of the emperor's new clothes. So when the emperor and his retinue made a grand procession to display his sartorial grandeur, the emperor beamed, his retainers smiled, and the audience applauded. Not to do so of course would be, well, stupid. The procession went swimmingly until a child cried out: "The emperor has no clothes', at which the crowd laughed, the courtiers grimaced, and the emperor, trying to salvage his dignity, haughtily marched on.

The emperor's new clothes were the product of a tailor's effort, and to the child only seeing was believing. But for adult types, believing can also occur in spite of our eyes, as

when we recognize causes that are obscure or special. In Anderson's story, the tailors were earnest and persuasive sorts. They had to be right, somehow, in spite of our eyes. After all, to deny their apparent industry and integrity would look stupid. Belief occurred not because of the 'dependent measure' of the tailor's product, which was nowhere to be seen, but from the 'independent' measure of two tailors and the assumed validity of their mysterious art.

Sometimes, it takes a bit of naiveté to see the naiveté in others

The lessons of this story are easy to find. Look at any medium, and you'll find an advertiser who wants you buy into their line. If your friends, family, and assorted 'experts' agree, and even if personal experience doesn't seem in line, the line becomes a 'trend' line, and we all like lemmings jump aboard, regardless of our vision of the cliff below. From the tulip craze in Holland in 17th century to contemporary manias for real estate to gold, bubbles are a proxy for wisdom, as money merely sloshes from one safe haven to another rather than derives from a growing store of value. Of course, everyone knows that the internet is an

unqualified boon, and in spite of our own misgivings, this universal opinion is a substitute for a good explanation that demonstrates that we really are getting the short end of the stick. But delusions like this are not new, even if we literally *are* getting the short end of a stick.

The Asch Conformity Experiment

other lines. It should be a simple matter to conclude that line A is bigger than the others, unless you are in a room with a bunch of folks who beg to differ. Although you remain unpersuaded, you go with the flow, and vote along with the mob, and you will continue to do so until one person in the group also begs to differ, which fortifies your resolution, and up to now suppressed common sense.

Of course, if you'd take a moment to think of a better explanation of the matter than a group of people taking leave of their senses, you may hypothesize a differed incentive, namely, that they are in it to con you. That is in essence the classic Asch conformity experiment. *In the basic Asch paradigm*[xxiv]*, the participants — the real subjects and the confederates — were all seated in a classroom. They were asked a variety of questions about the lines such as how long is A, compare the length of A to an everyday object, which line was longer than the other, which lines were the same length, etc. The group was told to announce their answers to each question out*

loud. The confederates always provided their answers before the study participant, and always gave the same answer as each other. They answered a few questions correctly but eventually began providing incorrect responses.

In a control group, with no pressure to conform to an erroneous view, only one subject out of 35 never gave an incorrect answer. Solomon Asch hypothesized that the majority of people would not conform to something obviously wrong; however, when surrounded by individuals all voicing an incorrect answer, participants provided incorrect responses on a high proportion of the questions (32%). Seventy-five percent of the participants gave an incorrect answer to at least one question.

In the Asch conformity experiment, perceptions did not lie, although the perception of what response was necessary *was* a lie. The subject has no explanation for the behavior of his peers, but relented to their pressure because as a rule of thumb, his peers obviously knew best. But what if the lines were concealed behind separate curtains, never to be revealed? If the crowd assuredly pointed to one of the curtains, we would likely follow as a matter of faith. And indeed that is what having a faith is, a heuristic conclusion that your trusted peers can't be wrong. Extend this principle to religious or political faiths, and one notes the persuasive power of decisions that cannot be explained.

When rules of thumb derive not from explanation but from mere correlation (e.g., my friends repeatedly do not steer me wrong.), you are using inductive principles. These principles can steer you right, or as the Asch experiment demonstrates, badly wrong. Similarly, why we use the internet is driven by inductive principles that without explanation lead you to assume that the choices of your peers are right, and fail to question if they have an ulterior motive. And the results are invariably that we are left with the short end of the stick.

Plato's Garbage Pile

The internet is a distraction medium par excellence, as it can sidetrack you to areas that scarcely reflect your main interests at hand. But even if we keep our focus on the straight and narrow, in lieu of making our attention roam wide, the internet can make our attention long. This may represent the most insidious distraction of all. Defined as a *transformational distraction*, our engagement with information may extend beyond the usefulness *of* that information. This is particularly the case with internet use, as an article on a topic is often nested with links and sidebars that contain other similar articles on the same topic. As we move from one article to the other, the marginal usefulness of each article declines, and the productive use of our time dramatically declines as we dwell on not on a theme, but variations *of* a theme.

For example, consider a shopper going to Wal-Mart in search of a couple of tomatoes. Upon quickly finding his perfect, ripe red veggies (fruit actually), his attention is drawn to the other tomatoes in the aisle that are a bit overripe. Soon his attention moves again to a row of spoiled tomatoes, and then finally to a bushel of rotten tomatoes. He becomes eventually up to his ears in tomatoes, entranced not so much by their ripeness but by the novelty of their rottenness.

Now consider an individual who wants to go out to the movies. Wanting to note the critical opinion on a specific film, he goes to the website 'Rotten Tomatoes'. The site, which contains scores of reviews for individual films, gives him fresh information on the quality of the film. But other reviews of the site's page remain compelling, even if the information is redundant and stale. But our information

shopper persists, accessing even more reviews as the quality of the information becomes progressively more stale and 'rotten'.

In hindsight, both shoppers would have been better off searching in a smaller venue such as a farmer's market or local newspaper. They would have gotten good tomatoes and good movie reviews, and not have wasted time with the diminishing returns of looking at fruit or film reviews that have less and less useful knowledge to give. When we apply the moral of this story to the internet, we note that the internet is super in finding important things that with slight variations endlessly repeat themselves. We hook on to the variation, but forget the fact that the information is redundant, and is likely as stale as a three week old tomato.

Plato's Garbage Pile

So if you are looking about facts about the economy, a Mideast war, a football game, or whatever, you will find a pile of facts that have as much enduring value as a bushel or rotten tomatoes. You are what you eat, and you are also what you learn. And if you end up consuming a lot of redundant information only to learn scarcely nothing more for your trouble, you've just filled up on virtual garbage.

Procrastination and the spell of danger

When we go to the movies, it's often in the nick of time before the feature starts. And when the feature does start, we take pleasure and excitement in watching folks do things once again in the nick of time. Consider the proverbial time bomb. It is a metaphor for plot lines like getting the girl, solving the crime, averting the fire, saving the planet, and of course defusing the bomb when there is literally no time to spare. Miss the deadline and there will be a proverbial or actual explosion that will render the hero and all the good things he stands for into a pile of dust. That's what makes drama so dramatic, the fact that the outcome is always uncertain until a resolution comes in the nick of time. Identifying with our hero in the cinema means putting ourselves in his place, and this cinematic empathy can drive us to tears, horror, disgust, or delight, but underscoring it all is a need for our undivided attention. The easiest way to do that is to literally wait until the last minute, or preferably, the last second. But that of course is courting danger, and danger is something that we presumably are instinctively geared to avoid or flee through the intervention of a 'hard wired' stress response, with the result that danger would be something we would continually want to avoid. But we don't, and that's the rub. The fact that we wait until the last minute to get things done means that we are actively putting ourselves into stressful or near stressful situations that we by all accounts should wish to avoid. But how can this be? Like a moth to the flame we are at once attracted and repelled by danger, but the problem and irony is that we couldn't be motivated to do

things otherwise. Danger increases risk, and risk embodies the prospect of uncertainty, and it is precisely this fact that makes us attentively aroused and more attuned to the task at hand. But with it, we are also incented to stay the course of *being* uncertain. That is the property of the neuro-modulator dopamine, which primes us to be alert and imparts incentive value to moment to moment behavior. But because dopamine only increases the value of momentary behavior, it can act at cross purposes to our long term interests. Hence we often procrastinate *to be* attentive, a state of mind that is dependent upon the uncertainty of the moment but ignorant of the long-term prospects of behavior irrespective of their danger.

Motivation is da bomb!

But what is procrastination? Simple definitions of procrastination mean to postpone activities until another time. Of course, that by definition covers everything you postpone, whether it's logical or not. So if to order our daily schedule means to do one thing in deference or postponement of another, that means that our whole life is spend procrastinating, which is absurd. A better definition is provided by the Oxford Dictionary, which holds that *"Procrastination is a postponement, often with the sense of*

deferring though indecision, when early action would have been preferable," or as "deferring action, especially without good reason." [xxv] The concept that procrastination is an inherently unreasonable thing has been echoed by many pundits[xxvi xxvii xxviii xxix], who concur that procrastination is the irrational delay of behavior.

At root however this definition is nonsense, for even irrational behavior must have a reason to be. It's only when behavior doesn't fit our prized model that we curse the agent rather than the explanation, but the faulty explanation always loses. Consider the behavior of the solar system. The fact that it didn't conform to the model that put the earth in the center of the universe didn't make the planetary motions irrational, and even faulting the God for bad design principles couldn't escape from the fact that the world worked in mysterious but not irrational ways. As creatures who embody the natural world, the conclusion is the same. Humans act in mysterious but not quite irrational ways, and behavior must serve reasons both obvious and subtle, as there is nothing nutty under the sun. The point therefore is not to decry the unreasonableness of procrastination, but investigating why for us common folks procrastination is often not an unreasonable but a necessary and rational thing.

Consider the fact that we don't work when we are sleepy, hungry, or are under the sun, and generally wait until a time when we are rested, sated, or in the cool of the evening. We do this because at a later time we can work faster, more comfortably, and with more alertness and attention to our job. In these cases, 'procrastination' is rather a justifiable delay. Procrastination can also be a reasonable thing if we consciously or non-consciously postpone an action in order to inject an element of risk into behavior. Since risk increases

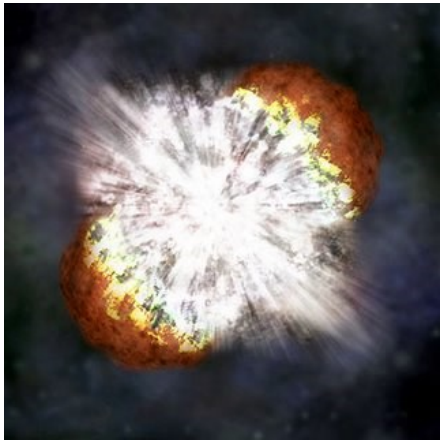
dopamine release that corresponds with positive affect and attentive alertness, procrastination can actually increase the effectiveness of behavior. In other words, procrastination is a reasonable thing if it represents the non conscious manipulation of affect to *increase* effectiveness, whereas procrastination due to distraction or the apprehension of pain (e.g. putting off a dental appointment) simply reduces effectiveness. But both are reasonable in their own way, as procrastination may serve both approach and avoidance. Ultimately, doing things effectively means doing things *affectively*, and that often means acting just in time. The non-reasonableness of behavior is an aspect of everything we do because motivation requires activation, and this means affect. In other words, to be effective we must be affective, and affect never falls within 'good reason' unless there is good reason to manipulate affect. Ultimately, procrastination implies irrationality, but irrationality occurs when we ignore reasonable causes, and when affect is left out of the picture of human behavior we are left confused and needful of a title to describe how timeliness of behavior cannot be predicted by the reasonableness of behavior. Thus procrastination is not an artifact of behavior, but of our ignorance of how motivation works.

Psychology goes Nova

Mark Twain once remarked that the United States is special because its people possess the one true faith, several hundred of them. Likewise, for the social sciences, the United States is special because its academics possess the one true explanation, numbering also in the hundreds.

Of course, practical people that we are, we have the one true answer to this babel of opinion. We ignore it, unless of course it proves useful. If the explanation proves vicariously useful, we have superstition, and give some credence to the predictive power of black cats, the astrological significance of the movement of planets, and of saying lots of prayers to St. Jude. If its practically useful, it becomes common sense, and has no author.

But for psychologists and their pet schools of thought, usefulness is neither practical or vicarious, it is *precarious*. In other words, if you are psychologist with a Freudian, behaviorist, or some other point of view, its predictions sound just swell, until of course they fail to test out. It is then that like a hot gaseous star that has burned off its fuel (or for a school of psychology, its credibility), it will collapse upon itself and explode, leaving a white dwarf that represents a puny beacon signaling the star's former ethereal greatness. And this is exactly what we have for once influential (transactional analysis anyone?) psychological points of view that faintly glimmer in the minds of a few remnant true believers.



Evolutionary Psychology goes Boom!

This astronomical fact serves as a swell metaphor for psychology and the invariable schools of thought from time to time that swell up to give us 'the answer', describing human behavior in all its cantankerousness. From psychoanalysis to behaviorism and as of late, dubious schools of thought such as evolutionary psychology and relational frame theory, they are puffed up with hot gas that invariably blows up under the weight of its useless and contrary data.

Which brings us to pop psychology, which compared to hi-falutin concepts in psychology, quickly blazes into glory and fades away as rapidly. As a comet is a celestial low life, so too is pop psychology a *philosophical* low life. Nonetheless, for a bright brief second, it also lights up the sky, and gets into the newspapers and an appearance on Oprah. But just as quickly, the comet passes by. We realize then that it was just an overheated block of ice, and that we were blockheads to believe. But that's ok, as the author of the flash in the pan comes back a few years later with a new lexicon and reinvents the philosophical wheel, and for one brief moment, lights up the sky.

Regression towards Meanness

So the BCS won't cotton to a play off for college football teams.

Well, that's plain *mean*, which is after all, *the point.*

Actually, the BCS methodology for determining top teams, involving polling, computer analysis, and a coin flip here and there is a much more equitable way of determining top teams than a play off. And here's why.

Consider if you would a simple roll of a die. Cast it a few times and the average result would likely be skewed from one to six. Over time and trials, the mean should always arrive at about three, and given this mediocrity principle, one can pretty reliably predict what the average value for a die roll will be.

Similarly, if you have the luxury of having a playoff series where the same two teams play a best of seven, then you are more likely to arrive at a true champion than if only one game was played. One can picture the howls decrying unfairness if the World Series was merely a series of one.

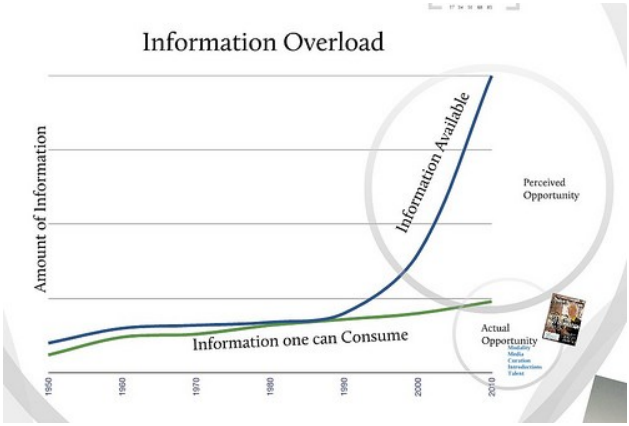
The mediocrity principle is everywhere we look, as we gauge our intelligence, accomplishments, or good fortune not on one instance, but on the average of many. It's the reason that we can survive in the face of adversity, because we know the law of averages. Sports should be no different, but given time and expense, we have to settle for one playoff game whose results are no more representative of the truth than the mere role of a die.

Logically, a computer can average it all out, and come up with a nice averaged answer. A true enough result, but mediocre, and that depressing predictability is something that games are not set out to do.

Thus, the next time you are rooting for the home team, know that if the winner is beforehand unpredictable, then it's not really a winner until it represents a predictable state of affairs. A mediocre outcome certainly, but mediocrity is after all the shade of the truth.

Searching for Red Stockings: The Myth of Information Overload

As the internet advocate Clay Shirky noted, everybody who talks about information overload starts with the graph with the telltale ascending line and the litany of the troubles it entails. As the line informs us, information is increasing exponentially, and we can barely deal with it intellectually and emotionally, or more and more often, we can't. And the solution? It is here that the rallying cries diverge.



Scary Graph

On one side there is Shirky, who assigns the problem to filter failure, and why not? It's a reasonable thing after all to suppose that if we had better ways to sort out information, we could cull the bad from the good, and be able to significantly reduce the information we have to cope with daily. Search, social media, and e-commerce firms of course concur, and are rapidly improving their search algorithms

(using of course information about you that you voluntarily or involuntarily port over to them) so you can find what you need the first time.

On the other hand is the internet critic Nicolas Carr, who attributes information overload to filter success. In Carr's opinion our filters are working all too well, and the problem is that they are getting better and better. Thus,

"…. The real source of information overload…. is the stuff we like, the stuff we want. And as filters get better, that's exactly the stuff we get more of.

It's a mistake, in short, to assume that as filters improve they have the effect of reducing the information we have to look at. As today's filters improve, they expand the information we feel compelled to take notice of. Yes, they winnow out the uninteresting stuff (imperfectly), but they deliver a vastly greater supply of interesting stuff. And precisely because the information is of interest to us, we feel pressure to attend to it. As a result, our sense of overload increases."

Implicit in both arguments is this premise:

The information we want is the same as the information we need.

This is an argument for the curing salve of better filters (to fine tune what we want, since our wants are *finite*) or a call for mass despair (because our wants are *infinite*, and thus overwhelm us when they are invariably served by the web).

This premise derives from an assumption that in our hubris we are wont to make: that humans are rational agents that know what they want and why.

But what if this was not true? What if we are at root irrational creatures who delude ourselves into thinking that we know what we want and why we want it? What if the information we want is more often than not different from the information we need? If this is true, then to paraphrase

Shakespeare, our fate is not in the stars (or rather the cloud), but in ourselves, because if the information that we want is often *not* the same as the information we need, then we need to be aware how to distinguish our wants from our needs and how to constrain the former. In other words, for information overload, the key is to understand how our basic motivations work.

The question that Shirky and Carr beg is thus elemental: *Why is information of interest to us, because it is important, or because of something else?* To answer this question, let us illustrate how a basic search was performed over the last few generations by going to our metaphorical sock drawer in search of red stockings.

It's 1912, and you as t-shirt manufacturer want to begin a production run of commemorative t-shirts of the Boston Red Stockings triumph in the World Series. As soon as the game is over you receive an immediate telegraph of their victory, and it's off to the races to start production.

It's 1932, and you as a t- shirt manufacturer want to get started with your commemorative t-shirt run, and so you listen to the game on the radio, and upon its completion, get to work.

It's 2012, and you as a t-shirt manufacturer want get to cracking on your production run celebrating the Boston Red Sox victory, and you follow the sox from college draft to preseason to all of their games through the World Series, and monitor all the social and news media who have something to say about it.

In all three time frames, the decision point happens in a second at a predetermined moment, namely when (hopefully) the sox win. The narrative of how that final fact (a sox victory in the final game) got there is irrelevant. No matter what era, the decision point is concise, precise, and

momentary, and gets to you on time regardless of the media you use and irrespective of its background story. There is no need to follow the narrative that describes the changing facts that get us to that point, as the point of the last man flying out in the last inning is all we need.

The difference between the three eras is that in the first era we could not follow the narrative that follows the sox on their way to the pennant, but in the latter era we could. But following the latter comes at a cost. By following the progress of the sox we become diverted from other things of value, and suffer regret. If these diversions are small scale and populate our working day, they become distractions and cause us to lose focus and attention. Finally, as we continually choose between distraction and staying on course, we become tense and nervous.

The metaphor of 'information overload' would seem to apply here, as every frame of every moment of the continuous narrative leading to the Red Sox pennant can and is considered by the sox fan. However, like a strip of static frames in a motion picture that give rise to a sense of movement or motion, the story is interesting because of the novel ways the narrative changes, and it is the changes that compel. Thus, although the ending is necessary for us to go about our business, the story that leads to it is compelling not because of what it is, but how it is continually transformed.

We can expand our simple red sox narrative to the narratives embedded in all the things we do that are being progressively revealed by the web. We need to know facts, but what obsesses us is the narrative or story that brings us to those facts. The internet produces not just more information, but more narratives *of* information. We see not a picture, but a movie, not a note, but a score, not a phrase

but a speech. Moreover, we conflate the importance of the narrative with the significance of its conclusion, or what we want with what we need. This is a dangerous delusion, for the stuff we want depends upon the narrative or facts in motion, but the stuff we need depends upon the facts sitting still.

We can get the facts we daily need in a half hour, but continually accessing the web to see a moving stock market, middle east crisis, or what Uncle Charlie is up to are never ending stories that excite us, engage us, but ultimately bring us down. A narrative is of course still important if our behavior necessarily changes in tandem. In this case the narrative is 'feedback'. Thus, a quarterback's performance is determined by feedback during the moment to moment course of the game. However, for the stadium audience, this feedback is entertainment, and for those who attend to the ever expanding narrative on the game itself, an unnecessary obsession.

The Myth of Information Overload

As a metaphor, information overload attributes the psychological effects of the internet to what information is rather than how it is arranged. But humans are above all novelty-seeking creatures, and novelty is enhanced not in the facts but in the stories they tell. Because the explanation for how the web influences us psychologically is based on core assumptions on human motivation that are faulty, we proceed with our daily lives under a dangerous illusion abetted unfortunately by the perverse incentives of our media providers to keep us hanging onto the story when the conclusion is all we need. Whether or not we can escape this illusion and its dire consequences depends ultimately on a better story.

Shakespeare and the Turtle

Once upon a time, William Shakespeare was walking on Stratford Street, across from Avon. He stopped at the curb, and slowly, a turtle passed by him and began to cross the street.

As the turtle crawled into the distance, Shakespeare turned to hear an idling crowd. Go *walk* and get the turtle, they said, and we shall applaud.

A theater manager, knowing a good thing when he saw it, said *skip* to the turtle and I will pay you money.

A pretty girl in the crowd then said, *twirl* as you walk and I will kiss you!

A man then cried out, reach the turtle *before* I do and you will be a better man than I.

Then he heard from the palace window the Queen, who said *hop* to the turtle and I will make you a knight!

Several friends beckoned to him. And show us moves that we can perform with similar *acclaim*!

Finally, a ghost appeared to him, and said to Shakespeare, make it all *original*, and I the ghost of posterity will remember you.

And so Shakespeare pondered for some time the diverse requests of his audience, and with budding excitement came to a solution. Then, in a balletic motion that would do Balanchine proud, he walked and he ran and he twirled and he hopped. He did it all with originality, with speed, and with panache. And so his walk across the street became choreography for the ages, and perhaps maybe, just maybe, he even got the turtle.

In the movie Shakespeare in Love, our hero was muddling over a new play that was not coming on at all well. It was titled 'Romeo and Ethel, the Pirates Daughter'. Burdened with an uninspiring title and plot, he at first despaired of his own genius. Inspiration of course came to the rescue, but the muse was dressed in a dozen very different robes, and represented the mundane things that filled his world. And so were such inspirations cast as a crowd that demanded sex and violence, a playhouse owner wanting a popular play, a girlfriend longing for lines of romantic intimacy, a Queen desiring pratfalls, and actors in his troupe clamoring for good lines. And of course, for pride's sake he had to surpass the efforts of his rival Christopher Marlowe, and above it all, forever beckoning, was the specter of posterity. With such inspiration, or rather, inspirations, Shakespeare could not help but create works of surpassing genius, and be charged with the motivation that created them. The cauldron of genius is seasoned with a dozen motivations, and the more diverse the demands, the greater heights does it vault. Genius requires not an audience, but audiences, and it is diverse demand that is the spark of motivation that electrifies the mind. Educational psychologists would do well to learn this lesson, that genius comes when it is wanted, from everywhere.

Note: Oh yes. And the real Shakespeare? Consider an environment full of external motivators for a pastime as addictive to its age as our time is for television. To quote Daniel Boorstin's book 'The Creators' (pp.307-310): "The theater had risen in London during Shakespeare's youth. The suddenness with which the new pastime had appeared raised the alarm of the learned and the pious. Like television in our time, theater acquired its frightening popularity within a half century." "…..In two weeks during the 1596

season a Londoner could have seen eleven performances of ten different plays at one playhouse, and on no day would he have had to see a repeat performance of the day before."…."Of the twelve hundred plays offered in London theaters in the half century before 1590, some nine hundred were the work of about fifty professional playwrights." (It should be noted that the London of 1590 had about the population of present day Jackson, Mississippi!!) This author wonders what a Vesuvius of inspiration would follow if present day authors had such willing ears, and what any of us would trade for such *extrinsic* motivation!)

Stalin's Maxim

"The death of one is a tragedy; the death of millions is a statistic."
Josef Stalin

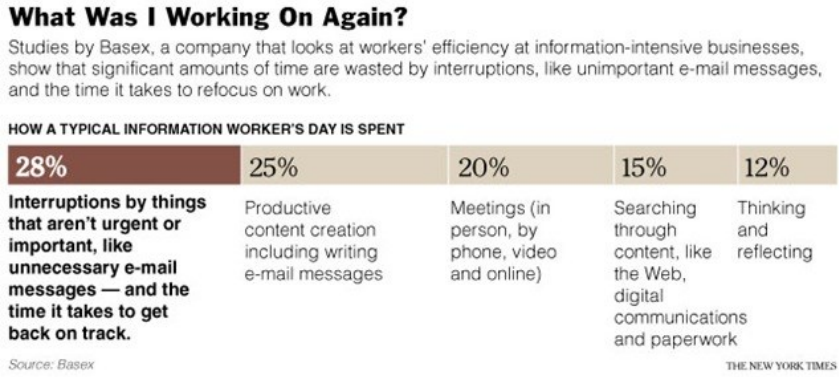
What is the future of the republic? It's smart phone enabled, that's what. We start with the future inaugural of a new president, and then track back, way back, until we stop at the president's soon to be dad, using his smart phone to book a ticket on the outbound train so he can just in time introduce himself to the president's soon to be mom.
Moral of the story: AT&T and Blackberry Smart Phone: Your future enabled!

Back to the future app

When the hype machine morphs into a time machine, we know we have problems. In the blissful world of Web 2.0, we are in touch continually, simultaneously, productively, and happily with everything that counts everywhere. And we are constantly reminded of this great boon through the flash of sights and sounds and breathless imagery of nonstop advertising and bleeping reminders. Now, tethered to our i-phones, pads, pods, and assorted

information appliances, it's not just you, but the Web 2! However, bring your appliances to work and have them enabled for you at work is akin to 'bring your daughter, puppy, or mother in law to work day'. Needless to say, you won't get that much done. Unfortunately, there's no profit to device manufacturers, content providers, and software developers in telling you differently, until you realize it the hard way when your company shows 'no profit'.

And then there are statistics, statistics, and more damn statistics. The web is a distracter mechanism par excellence, and to how measure distracters on the web take their toll on the productivity of homo-sapiens in his working habitat, you simply add them up. It's all in the numbers.


What Was I Working On Again?
Studies by Basex, a company that looks at workers' efficiency at information-intensive businesses, show that significant amounts of time are wasted by interruptions, like unimportant e-mail messages, and the time it takes to refocus on work.
HOW A TYPICAL INFORMATION WORKER'S DAY IS SPENT
28%
Interruptions by things that aren't urgent or important, like unnecessary e-mail messages — and the time it takes to get back on track.
25%
Productive content creation including writing e-mail messages
20%
Meetings (in person, by phone, video and online)
15%
Searching through content, like the Web, digital communications and paperwork
12%
Thinking and reflecting
Source: Basex
THE NEW YORK TIMES

Stat Sheet

So, on average, 28% of our time at work is spent wasting time[xxx]. Sounds bad, until you realize that averages have a way of getting away from you because deep down, they aren't you! Thus we know that half of us are over weight, most of us are too stressed, and nearly all of us waste too much time. But so what? Against the dead hand of numbers and percentages are those everyday experiences of you and I who use the web to get the score, settle a score, or in the

case of our stranger on a train, just score. Individual experiences trump statistics, even though in the end we all become one of them. Statistics are an ineffective counterweight against the immediate pull of personal experience, and inverts Stalin's maxim for a new score of happy victims. One may say in these gentler times on internet omniscience that a simple search is a happy fact, but that the inconvenience and suffering wrought by millions of them is but an unhappy statistic.

A Sticky Medium

The web is a sticky thing, which means you stick with it from hyperlink to hyperlink as you start out looking for a chicken recipe and end up looking at pictures of polar bears. But webs after all are meant to keep you *stuck* in place. At least, that's the spider's plan. If anything, the web is a very sticky place that sends you careening to and fro in cyberspace like a hyper-kinetic pinball, while you all the while remain stuck in the medium. For the reasons we have discussed, the web cried out for borders, constraints, or at the very least a five ball limit. Of course they don't

Your brain on the internet

call them hyper-links 'hyper' for nothing, and there is no software fix that can shut down your fix before you go off exploring for polar bears. There is of course a solution, just change your search medium to one that's truly un-sticky, a simple medium that focuses on the subject matter of interest to you, and has a finite supply of 'links' to other similar and dissimilar subject matter. It's old-fashioned stuff that is

portable, insightful, keeps on message, and is sadly on the way to extinction.

It is the magazine, newspaper, and good old fashioned hardbound book. Unlike the web it doesn't provide you variations on a theme, just the theme. So you have to make do with one article on a topic, not four hundred, one movie review, not fifty, and if you want to share your opinion, your spouse or co-worker would just have to do.

This is nothing more than the economic law of diminishing marginal returns in action, where the first choice is the best because it gives you most of what you need the first time. Thus, the first movie review is enlightening, but succeeding ones are progressively less so, until you read them merely for the odd turn of phrase.

The question is, do you want a redundant message or a succinct one, or do you care more about how a message is fashioned than what it says? The issue again is utility versus novelty. Media such as magazines and newspapers maximize utility and constrain novelty, and when they have their say, there is no space left for a variant on the theme which adds nothing but variations in grammar. Utility trumps novelty, and all because of the unintended consequences of the price of newsprint. And why should we value this when internet diversion awaits? Ultimately, it is because our time is valuable, and to use time well we must cordon off our pleasures as well as our pains. A measured life, a life of proportion and balance is mediated by the very boundaries inherent in the things we do from an afternoon football game to an eight hour day to even the simplest pleasures of reading a book or magazine. When it is done it is done, and we become unstuck until another day.

Tiger Woods vs. One Billion Monkeys

Consider a hole of golf with Tiger Woods pitted against one billion monkeys. Besides the fact that a billion monkeys, if given enough time and typewriters, can hammer out all of the plays of Shakespeare, it stands to reason given an eternity or so that they wouldn't be all too shabby at golf either. Assuming that one billion monkeys at the 18th hole equal the efforts of one monkey making his billionth attempt at a par four, then you can be pretty sure that at least one of the little fellows will finish the hole with a score superior to Tiger.

So what are we to make of our triumphant little duffer? You can conclude that there is something special about the monkey that makes him better than Tiger, or that perhaps he merely was lucky, given of course the billion to one odds. Playing the hole again would of course prove no contest, as the little simian would regress back to the mean of his peers,

which should be around 500,000 strokes per hole, at least.
Still, one can be left with the opinion that there was something to be said about the monkey's skill, in spite of the fact that there was no explaining his accomplishment outside of pure blind luck. This predilection to derive lawfulness from simple correlations or patterns represents the problem of *induction*. Induction is defined as the imputation of lawfulness from a limited or token number of phenomenal patterns. And it is also at root, illogical. Thus, to follow the argument of the philosopher David Hume, noticing that the sun rises day after day leads one to imputes a lawfulness (i.e. the sun will rise each dawn forever) to the state of affairs that *does not logically follow* from that observation. It just takes one example of the sun not rising for such a law to be refuted, something that such a 'law' cannot guarantee.
But logic has never stopped one type of monkey, namely homo-sapiens, from seeing lawfulness in all sorts of correlations. From tea leaves to the movements of the planets, there is always some type of correlation between physical events and behavior that can ascend to the realm of law. Nowadays, we've progressed from the days of reading goat entrails, and have new correlations that map the order of our personal worlds. This psycho-logical (actually an oxymoron) way of looking at things give us new laws of behavior, all of course that follow from simple correlations. Psychologists love correlation, which like scripture can be interpreted for their own, often devilish purposes. Indeed, correlations are embedded in the very way psychologists do science, as they statistically correlate one set of observations with another to find with the assurance of a court astrologer the psychological laws that like the stars, rule our behavior. But simple correlations and

the rules they engender are merely ways of explaining things on the cheap, and as with anything that comes cheap, you get what you pay for. Indeed, with such an easy currency of 'knowing', no one really gets to know anything, as the cacophony of psychological laws, from the psychoanalytic to the evolutionary attest.

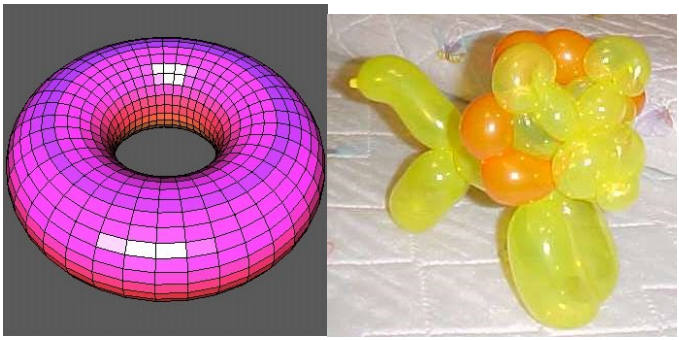
For any aspect of behavior, a true explanation must look at all the things in the shadows, the events that vault from mere uni-dimensional correlation to reflect the true multi-dimensional mechanics of the world. Thus a problem of behavior must be examined from all vantages. A true psychological explanation therefore imputes order or lawfulness from an examination of all the phenomenal patterns of the world, from the qualia of experience (pain, pleasure), to behavioral (what we do), cognitive (what we think), neurological and biological events. By considering all the possibilities, there is no extraneous possibility that can intrude, and make a sunless dawn. But this requires a bit of modesty, a healthy dose of self criticism, and an awareness that the truth most likely lurks not in our hubris, but in the shadows. Characteristics which alas are in short supply when one reads the rambling and transient certitudes of psychology.

Utopia is nowhere, thank goodness

It is a perfect world, having what we please. It is unknown to man, yet the object of an eternal and futile quest. It is Utopia, literally nowhere. Not so for our mammalian cousins, where only abundant fields will do. It is all a matter of incentive, and with animals it becomes transparently clear. The ability to forage, to roam, and to anticipate are rudimentary yet crucial ingredients for survival. But even for simple brains, perceptions have to shine above others, otherwise one would focus on everything, and get quite literally, nowhere. And so the simple cognitive maps, illuminated and selected by attention are necessary novel and positive things. Experience or learning is molded by such ideas that to our animal cousins can be configured into points on a grid. Thus B follows A, a mouse follows a scent, explores an unknown trail, and maps out the world in simple dimensions. Thus a happy animal in its heaven of heavens is an eternal forager, continually projecting forward, perhaps for a millisecond, an enticing and expectant future.

If it were only so simple for homo-sapiens. We are, or seem to be, entirely different. What's the difference between us and our pet cat? A bigger brain of course, but more specifically, a bigger part of our brain. An expanded cerebral cortex, or forebrain, provides us with the computational space not just to ponder, but to render. Thus the dreamer could dream he was dreaming in infinite recursion. Yet the emotional circuitry that governs our drives remained deeply embedded and essentially unchanged. Value, and in particular human value, was

carved out of this thinking stuff and became unique to all the world. We think of it as emergent, like a bubble ascending from froth, or consciousness arising from the dance of a billion neurons. But is value indeed something new and emergent, or is it a foraging response that is twisted in time and place by the metaphors of thought?



Topology

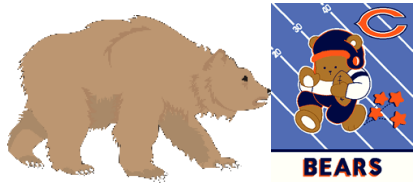
Consider a torus, a continuous three-dimensional loop. Twist it like a balloon into a plaything, and it emerges as a dog, but its topology or essential state remains the same.

For our mammalian cousins, the topology of motivation is simple: time, motion, and circumstance occur as a fixed arrow. There is no contemplation of alternatives, no rumination over lost opportunities, no measure of the branching possibilities that could be. Behavior is unremarkable, predictable, and the circle of life is a continuous recursion, moving in an eternal circle at once and never the same.

For humans, circles are dull things; we prefer instead a more convoluted path that we can twist backwards and forwards in time, map multiplying possibilities that elude apprehension, and see untold futures even in the

movements of stars. With a larger brain, nature has given us the opportunity to virtualize the possibilities, and to act in mind all eventualities as if they were real. Like a torus twisted into an animal, a foraging field becomes a field of dreams, and though it may seem a distinctive thing as a giraffe emerging from a twisted balloon, its topology or essence remains the same.

Consider a bear running in a field a hundred by thirty yards square. He can see ahead perhaps for a second, and map in his mind a limited set of moves that are suggested and constrained by a scent, a sound, or the notice of a rustle in the leaves. But what if in his mind's eye he could see more? Spontaneous movements can become coordinated tactics, all played out as what-ifs in the bears mind. Run right, run left, fake out prey with a sudden move, elude rivals with a dodge and a spurt of speed, and all replayable in memory for future edification and regret. And all of this measured against a host of imponderables faintly modeled that suggest future mating success, a suitable cave, and the regard of other bears and animals in the forest. The ability to render mere possibilities twists a simple sensitivity to new and important things into a game, a sport, or an entire culture, as the bear if it had a mind morphs into a Chicago Bear. With the virtual possibilities bestowed by a mind, all things delightful become illuminated by the mere contortion of a tease, which for mammals with a mind stirs the grandest dreams of a forager eternal.



Vespasian and the Machine

In the first century A.D., the Roman emperor Vespasian was presented with a machine replete with levers, pulleys and gears that would greatly automate the construction of public works. He waved off the opportunity with the observation, "and then what would the displaced workers do?" This is a question asked by a Luddite, who assumed that free time left folks with little to do, and was answered by the free market, which always found them something better to do. And so it went. Manual workers became knowledge workers, and work itself became more interesting, healthier, remunerative, and meaningful. This is a fine state of affairs, until creativity goes the way of the ancient stone mason, and is replaced by a machine that cannot be waved off.

Although the present of the internet serves mankind, the future of the internet is made for a certain brand of human being that ain't us, and that's because the future internet will take away our 'brand'. Homo-sapiens after all means wise man, but if wisdom itself is automated, we lose half our name and all of our soul. And it will do this by not by speeding up the search for new information, but by speeding up the creation of new knowledge. Sorting stuff and even finding stuff is predictable and dull. It is an accountant's trade, but even accountants earn their pay be being creative. The linear, repetitive, and predictable is the stuff for calculators, not people. Little do we think that computers will soon be calculating in creative ways as well,

but that is where we are headed in direction if not yet in fact[xxxi], and when they do mankind will cease to be wise.

Certainly, almost all popular, scientific, and literary opinion doesn't see this coming or accept its true implications, although these are clearly in the technological cards. Almost all of the vivid prognostications of the future, whether it be the futures predicted by science fiction or science fact keep sacrosanct the creative human mind. In our literary tradition, even intelligent machines aren't that creative, and are taught the error of their intellectual hubris by literally pulling their plug. Literary and cinematic folklore presume that this is hard to do as the machines automatically figure that this is something we will invariably want to do, and understandably resist; witness Hal the computer among a long list of intransigent machines who will not go lightly into the disconnected night.

So far, computers allow us to be more productive, healthier, intelligent, and creative. But their intelligence lies in manipulating knowledge, not creating knowledge. However, if and when they learn to be creative, at once they will put us all out of work, and finally confirm Vespasian's fear, not that workers have nothing to do, but that they have nothing meaningful *left* to do. But what may literally happen when all creation flowers in a day?

We can forget it for you wholesale

It was meant to be just a night out with the boys, and bowling at that. But these were no ordinary chums, but a group of wayward dwarves. And where was the location of the bowling alley, how about that cloud on the left, just follow the thunder. Well, to old Rip, it seemed like he was there only a short time, but as they say, time flies when you're having fun.

And when he settled afterwards in a nap, time flew. Perhaps it was the nap, perhaps it was the game, but when he awoke, generations had past, and Rip Van Winkle, the loyal subject to the English crown woke to a new world, and a new United States. And so, with King George forgotten to all as was his kith and kin, he found his lost daughter, and passed his remaining days full of memories of simpler days when time had measure and substance and meaning.

Time is money, but time is also memory. In the past the argument to spend one's time was pecuniary, in the future is may be regarded as the stuff of life. Without memory time vanishes, and when memory is truncated our lives lose meaning because meaning devolves into a void and a blur.

In Philip K. Dick's novelette 'We can remember it for you wholesale' (later morphed into the movie 'Total Recall', time *was* memory, so that life seemed longer and certainly more interesting when your noggin was injected with fabricated memories. Unfortunately, we can't add memories except through actually doing things, but we sure can eliminate them and speed up their passage. And now on the internet, we can do it wholesale!

RIP

Consider two mind experiments we inflict upon our minds all the time.

Time Erasure Experiment #1

You go to a party, and invariably meet a long line of your spouse's friends, one by one they tell you their names, which or course you immediately forget.

Time Erasure Experiment #2

On Monday you begin playing Halo Fantasy XXIII on your computer. Blink your eyes, and its Tuesday.

In both experiments we are doing everything so quickly each short term memory is pushed aside by the next meaningful sight or sound before it can register in long term memory, so time flies because we literally can't remember different times. In the first experiment, the memory loss is piecemeal; in the latter it is wholesale. This is why taking a break assists memory when it is a mere pause in behaving, but hinders memory when it is not a pause from behavior but a different behavior entire. Further, when memory falters, so does time, and we wonder when we are because we cannot recall where we have been.

Moral, when you go from daylight savings time to internet time, your time is not just spent, it is lost, and your life is shortened to that of a mayfly. So, if you're not careful, you may wake up some morning and find out that you have a proverbial long white beard and live in the Peoples Republic of America.
(But of course if you don't want to listen to this, you can just forget it!)

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